# The Tower

The Double Issue

2009

# the TOWER 2009

# Letter from the Editor

I first decided to apply for the *Tower* editor position because I wanted change for the publication. I in no way mean to denigrate former editors or editions, but the fact is, over the years, the publication has become more and more obscure. This is a liberal arts school with a liberal arts journal that half the students have no knowledge of. This is what I wanted to change. I want more people involved in the publication's production, more varied artistic styles included in the final product, and more readers dying to flip through those finished pages. I think this publication has taken a huge step toward that ideal—we have added foreign language poetry and playwriting to the creative lineup—but I hope that the desire to encourage progress in The *Tower* does not end here. I hope that change continues to come and we embrace it. I hope that we never choose to surrender to the stagnancy that can easily come to something 77 years old like the *Tower*, and I hope that that change brings in more work by all the many talented students at this university who deserve a place to display their talents. I look forward to reading what comes next within the Tower, and I hope all of you enjoy what exists here within our *Tower Double Issue*.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the production of this year's *Tower*. Thanks to the staff members who put their own work to the side in order to judge submissions. A very personal thank you goes out to my professors who overlooked much lateness on my part as things with the publication came to a head and to my family and friends who were supremely neglected during this time as well. I thank the *Montage* editor, Chris Hicks, the *Alabamian* editor, Kalyn Wolfe, and the UM public relations staff for all their help and resources. I save my greatest acknowledgement for Tiffany Roskamp-Bunt, one of the kindest people I know, without whom this publication would not exist. Thank you Tiffany, you really have been my savior.

Amanda Hosey
Tower editor, 2009

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## Roots Shaped Like Gears

Eric Cottingham

turning through the ground,
water-colored clouds smear
along a backdrop of Blue in my eyes,
as I lay nestled in a patch of dirt.

The dirt runs and stains
the clothes, but thats alright.
-clocks clean out just fine-

Close my eyes into night
and a smile through mourning.
The hills around lay slumbering
and look if some motion drug
a tight blanket of grass, twigs, cans,
-some empty, others not so much-
some nice scraps of nylon,
brightly colored resting against random
trees.
The blanket is tucked around the stone
corners, special care paid to the seams.

Of course by now the long blade coalesces
in it's old manner, soon dips deep,
cutting slow, smoothly
asymmetrical lines and patterns.
Spilling blood in neat little puddles.

It feels like melting ice
sliding through,
and tickles more than a bit
I don't mind telling you.

A shiver chips at my mind
like a squirrel nibbling bone,
So I take hold of the grassy coverlet,
roll myself in it, and settle back
into my new locality.

## Diamonds Are Forever

Megan Kunkle

Like wind through the grass machetes sing
as they sever hands and arms, piles of voices.
terror filled silence suffocates nights' peace.
Deep uneven breaths between the killing
chaos,
shaped as five feet, one hundred pound,
coked out kids. So cracked they
bathe the earth in blood that soaks
the ground, bleeding into
the soil and treasured roughs.
Our little gems of love tinted red.
Black boxed and stained with
four million lives
They shimmer and sparkle
a symbol of eternity.

## Heaven Can't Wait

Jayce Cosper

I slept for twenty-three days, nine hours, forty-two minutes, and thirteen seconds. I woke on a beach with white sands and green waters. I immediately knew what happened—the big day had come and gone. I guess they keep you asleep until you're capable of handling the cold, hard facts, not to mention the exhaustion which accompanies the hangover of living. The truth is, death was easy, much easier than life. One minute you're there, dealing with all that earthly bullshit, twenty-three days later you're here. After the best sleep imaginable, I had the best urination imaginable. A powerful piss, sensationally desensitizing, the kind where your whole body relaxes, and a feeling of serenity rushes over all your muscles and tension is extricated from your entire body.

I wore an orange tunic with teal-colored bellbottoms. I was shoeless, taking me back to a childhood of running and screaming barefoot throughout the Alabama countryside. I ran to the water, and splashed and played and spun around, until I was so dizzy and exuberant that I fell down. I laughed uncontrollably in the sand, and realized they must have given me morphine or something for me to feel this free, this relaxed. I sat down and erected the most majestic sand castle one could imagine, one which would put the Taj Mahal and Buckingham Palace to shame. I looked at my work, and had confidence in the fact that the ocean would never dream of wiping it out. This was my ocean, my sand castle, and I admired the permanence of my creation. After my hard work, I was famished so I headed toward the grove. Of course I knew where I was going. I guess they program all the directions of any place you could ever go when you undergo Transformation. It's impossible to get lost here. That powerless feeling of being lost, which some people feel over lifetimes, dissipates and in its place is security.

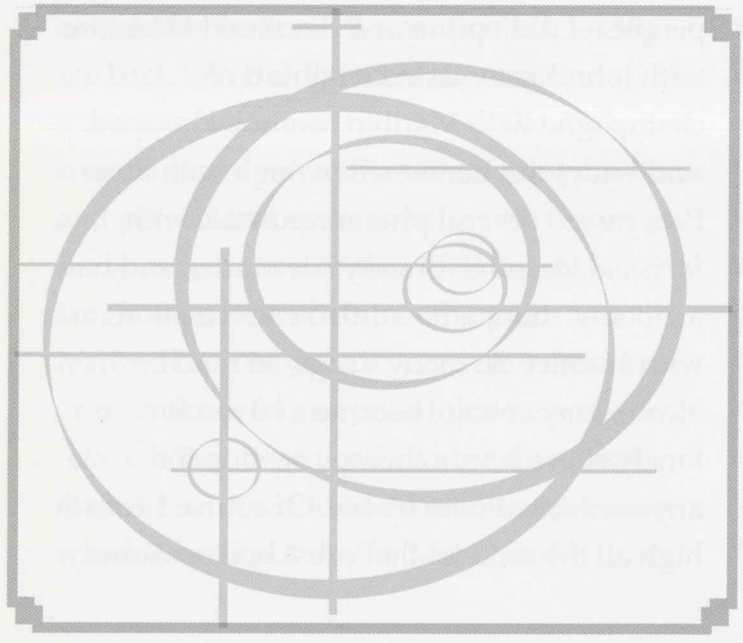
A morning fog traipsed up to my knees as I entered a grove. I admired rows upon rows of every fruit imaginable, all ripe for the taking. The colors popping from the light green leaves provided ecstasy to my eyes, like tiny streaks of Northern Lights. Reds, oranges, yellows, greens, purples, earthly colors exploding into one color I had never seen before. As there were no stipulations on which trees I could or could not eat from, as in the original Paradise, I sampled them all—tart apples, sweet apples, scrumptious oranges, Georgia peaches, mind-numbing tangerines, succulent pears, saccharine pomegranates, delicious bananas. Each fruit offered a new, sweeter taste, disregarding all the pesticides and herbicides and all the other –cides which came with earthly fruits. I admired God's organic leanings and knowledge of my taste in foods. The sweet juices which flowed relentlessly

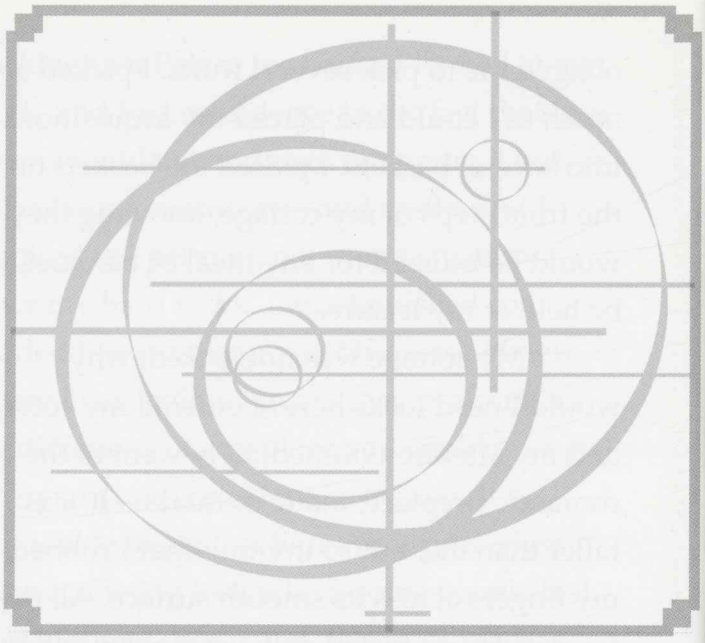
obliged me to pick several fruits. I picked as much as I could and placed my acquisitions into several baskets. I placed the baskets on the front steps of my cottage, knowing they would be utilized for any meal or banquet, to be held at my leisure.

My cottage was not locked; why would I need locks here? I entered my cottage and my attention immediately went to the romantic fireplace, made of marble. It was taller than me, but so inviting that I rubbed my fingers across its smooth surface. All my favorite books rested on bookshelves, ready to be pored over again and again with no interruptions. I picked up *The Catcher in the Rye*, and to my delight Holden Caulfield materialized before my eyes. I expected to meet famous people, but fictional people I never anticipated! I guess you can only read so much fiction before the characters and events become real to you, part of the fabric of your very life, informing your decisions and so on. So here was Holden Caulfield, wearing a red T-shirt and slacks. His hair was a little messy as he grinned, said hello, and offered me a pipe. I took a lighter conveniently placed in my pants pocket. I was still a little buzzed from the heavenly morphine, and the potent marijuana took me to a whole new level. I coughed as I exhaled the smoke and handed the pipe back to a smiling Holden. We got sufficiently stoned and hit up the stocked pantry, munching on Teddy Grahams, Easy Mac, Lucky Charms, and other stoner food. We opened ourselves up to each other, talking of all our earthly troubles and triumphs. You come here carrying all your earthly baggage—your fears, your unfulfilled dreams and desires, your shames, your dislikes—and you have an eternity to let go of all that held you back on earth, an entire eternity to become the one thing you always thought impossible to be: yourself. I expressed my hope that when I saw my friend Crystal I would feel just as free, letting go of all the desperation and loneliness I felt over the years following her death. Holden and I talked of our fathers, our mothers, our loves, our friends, topics both deep and shallow. I was Holden's and he was mine. We watched television and cuddled on the couch together, becoming higher and higher over the hours. Finally, I kissed him gently and waited for him to push me away, yell at me, or punch me, but he just grinned and told me I would never feel rejected here. And he kissed me back.

The next day I met some more people—I did opium and discussed literature with John Keats, tasted a myriad of champagne with Marilyn Monroe, dropped acid with John Lennon, flew high with Peter Pan, mixed several pharmaceuticals with *Invisible Monsters*' Brandy Alexander, and had a gloomy, marijuana-addled conversation with Hamlet. So many drugs, so much alcohol, my cottage became a haven for lonely characters, a therapy session for anyone fucked over by life. Of course I wasn't high all the time, as that's just boring. Some

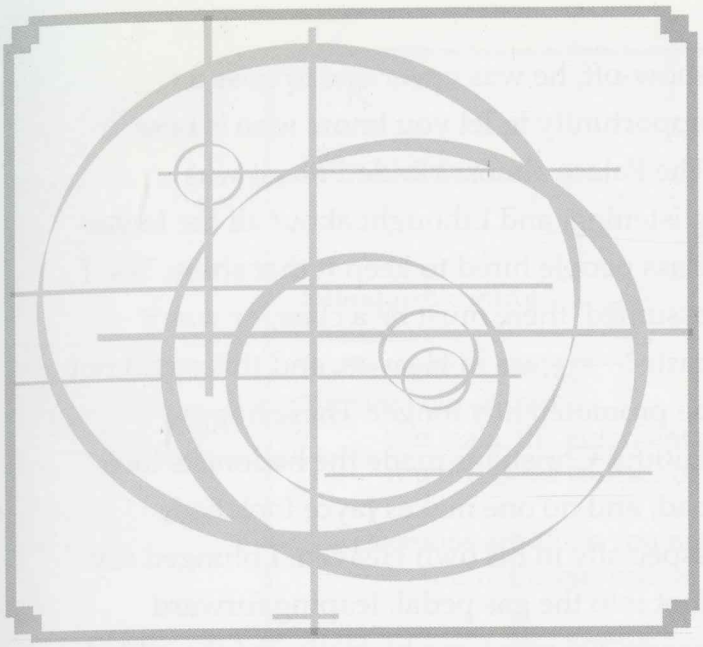
days I just chilled and watched television, which held new episodes of all my favorite shows—*Big Brother, The Wonder Years, Nip/Tuck, I Love Lucy, Bewitched, The Days of Our Lives, Grey's Anatomy*—each episode topping the last, never a dull moment in TV Land here. I laughed with the same fervor each time Jack Tripper had a misunderstanding on *Three's Company*, and reveled in anticipation every time JR was shot on *Dallas*. I occasionally watched the news, absent of depressing aspects which dominates the 10 o'clock news down there. While watching the news, I learned the fate of Larissa Collins. Naturally, I'd donated my organs. Of course the lungs and liver hit the reject pile—too many Marlboros, Tylenol PM's, and screwdrivers, I suppose. But my heart saved the life of sixteen-year-old Larissa Collins, who became a world-renowned scientist. Larissa played an integral role in discovering the AIDS vaccination, and I could almost hear her—my—heart as she nervously accepted the Nobel Prize. I smiled with the





knowledge that our teamwork would save millions, and that Larissa reaped the accolades I'd always imagined on Earth.

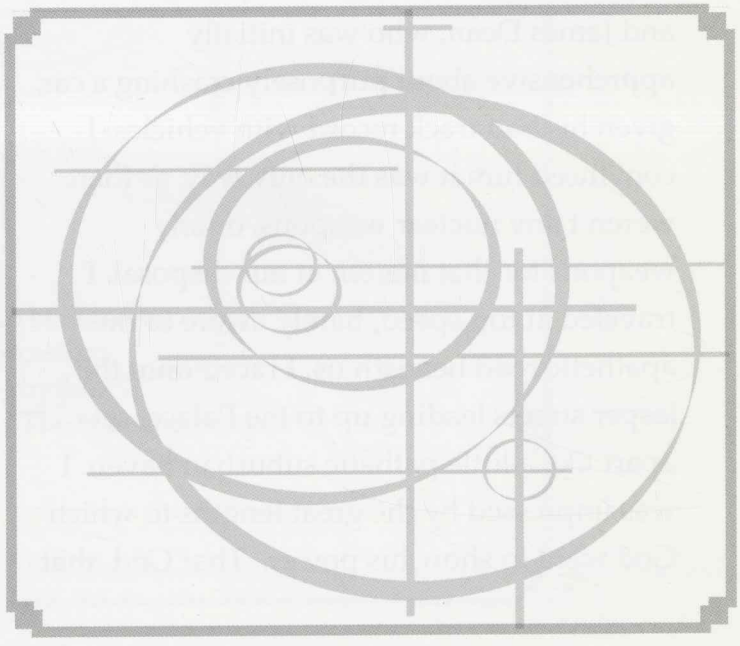
I hosted a party on the beach about three months into my stay. Of course everyone on my invite list came. The party was bouncing, as Britney Spears performed all her hits. She writhed in dance and sang all my favorite songs, truly at the top of her game. In the middle of "Toxic" I recognized the shirtless background dancers: they represented a lifetime of my unrequited crushes. There was Aaron Brakefield sweating and grinding against Ryan Herron, who was feigning stimulation on Trevor Alexander. All these men, who made me flush with embarrassment on Earth, were now prostrating themselves with the goddess Britney, putting on a show of orgiastic bliss, all for my enjoyment. Oh, how the tables turn here. I willed Matt Danforth to kiss Erin Hoover onstage, and it was good. As they



danced to the heavy beats and percussions, their eyes met mine, with longing and unimaginable heat. I laughed at my puppets as I danced with Holden, Marilyn, and Keats. Drugs and alcohol flowed everywhere, and the whole scene reminded me of Woodstock combined with a new age sex show, dirty hippies giving themselves over to absolute pleasure. I looked over to Keats and told him how happy I was, how I could never be happier.

Ever since my arrival, things were so damned perfect. As I took a tequila shot, I asked myself if they were too perfect, too good to be true. Isn't it human nature to think this when things are going so well? I realized I need drama; I need complications to drive me to some end goal. Here there was no purpose, just existence coupled with everlasting pleasure. Everything here reeked with a false veneer, like Vaseline on Miss America's teeth so her lipstick won't smear. I needed to upset this perfection, to stir the pot. I started a fight with Anna Nicole Smith, calling her fat, but she was complacent. I said things I'm not too proud of to Helen Keller, yet she pretended not to hear me. I knew anything I tried to do for dramatic effect would be covered up with everyone's limitless exaltation of Jayce, apparently a full-time job. I knew this would get boring, trite, and meaningless. I was bordering on depression when Holden told me about The Palace, which held the most fervent Christians you could ever imagine. Holden's words dripped with sarcasm and judgment as he told me how proud they were there, in their self-righteous Palace, glimmering in gaudy gold.

After the party, which lasted seventeen earthly years, I saw The Palace for myself, and it was a sight to behold, representing all the devout Christians who laid their treasures up in Heaven. In a way we felt sorry for them, the Chosen, for they were doomed for an eternity of singing boring hymns and worshipping, worshipping, worshipping. Yet still I couldn't help but wondering what made them so



special, what set them apart in their devotion that they could be privilege to all of God's dirty little secrets. I knew their unadulterated loyalty made it possible for our separate, hedonistic Heaven, for God bent the rules a little and let us be separate from the holy, the unclean separated from the clean. Coming off the bender that is Earth, where everyone is separated—Democrat and Republican, black and white, gay and straight, male and female, Jew and Gentile, etc.—I expected a little more attempts at cohesion on God's part, not a rerun of all the lines which divide people into entities, making it possible for wars and ill will in the human race. I spent my whole earthly life feeling separate, set apart from those in power, divided by some impenetrable binary opposite written in stone years before I entered the world. I could not let this separate worship-fest top mine, nor this division last any longer.

I hopped into my baby blue Rolls-Royce Phantom with Holden, John Lennon, and James Dean, who was initially apprehensive about purposely crashing a car, given his bad track record with vehicles. I convinced him it was the only way, as there weren't any nuclear weapons, or any weapons for that matter, at our disposal. I traveled at top speed, barely aware of the apathetic road beneath us. I raced onto the jasper streets leading up to the Palace, set apart like a little pathetic suburban haven. I was impressed by the great lengths to which God went to show his power. That God, that show-off, he was never one to miss an opportunity to let you know who is boss. The Palace almost blinded me, it was glistening, and I thought about all the lower-class people hired to keep it that shiny. Yes, I assumed, there must be a class, or was it caste?—system in Heaven, and this could not be promoted any longer. These happy faithful Christians made the hedonists look bad, and no one makes Jayce look bad, especially in his own Heaven. I plunged my foot into the gas pedal, leaping forward nearly 300 miles-per-hour toward the gilded and glorious Palace of God. I clenched my hands on the steering wheel and screamed, "Non servium, bitch!" Three, two, one, we have liftoff, there she goes, and—wait for it, oh yes, here it comes—Bang! Collision.

## R

Jessica Griggs

Relinquish control.
Realize.
Ruffle some feathers.
You are your own ruler.
You make the judgment calls.
You direct the courses of action; pronouncing…whatever you wish.

Decisions are all on you now.
You're the one calling the shots.

Right now you get to ruminate.
Ponder, brood.

Now is a time for routines to be tested.
Tweaked
so to speak.

Can the common, accustomed, and habitual
still remain "the norm?"

What role does each routine play?
Do they help or hurt?
Should they be kept or perhaps be lost
To the void that is time?

Is this what I really want?

Can you be resolute?
Hold steadfast when trouble breaks out.
Resist.
And stand strong.

There is a lot that remains to be unseen,
but I will RISE to the occasion.
All I need to do is figure out the rhythm.
The beat and tempo.

The rewards are imaginable.
Picturesque.
I already know what is waiting.

## Letter from a Helm

Kathleen Hairston

for you my arms are worms thoughtless of the hoe
spreading lengthy like soft canoes on milky switchbacks

how first did i leave: moth dusted

returning from beyond my gaze with a letter:

word meaning party
stone harvest or frenetic evacuation
in which backs plow from watery depressions

powdery clay swirling like serpents diffusing
rising like a dipper from a bowel

my eyes cannot evade my eyes
rain stings my visage
ropey hair slung back it's
all dyed red

now exposed to air the pigment catches magic back below
the twin also smiles but my memory is vague
red rides on its own

by an inverted name
here the stillborn speak
like mayors
and build ladders

how long my blood swoons
beyond your grasp
swimming within you like whispers

extracted with finesse
i will wonder

silence hanging on wires
and gaugeable brows
torn papers release rainbows
into wax working plows
taking time to touch timelessness

it is my birthday i am somber and gay
stringing up the moth piñata
i hope flutters
into my iris
blinding me

i reach into my pockets
where i find each hand
alone
save for a stone

convictions ejulation
wrought iron levers
wear lace
down fleet magma tunnels

when sun tunes another hue
it's ax my lover
gracing my palm

i ponder:
when its handle was barked and still bleeding sap
i was of a native
tread
dusted

## Death Bed Memory

John Lewis Beard

My final sun tossed a glare,
The crack in the window
Which gave me thought;
Distraction from the pain

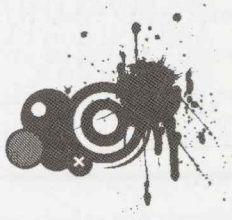
Month old carnations kept alive,
This true only through me
For tomorrow they too shall die
This true only through me

Portrait of a woman hanging,
Her baby in blue and pink
Held tight, wrapped up
So tomorrow he will be warm

My final sun tossed a glare
Through the crack in the window
Which is now at my feet; cold
for tomorrow they too shall be warm

My final chance read a prayer
Heaven or hell was my decision
Hand on arm, other on bible
I made my decision

Time witnessed my death
On a cold November morning,
Written by faith
I swallowed my last breath



## How To Properly End Something

Abbey Davis

Permanence was the point.
You wanted me to forgive you
and I did,
but I couldn't go further than that.
Each kiss that night,
after the concert,
between our cold, cloudy breaths
was meaningless.
You touched the scarf around my neck
and I remember being glad
I didn't wear the one you gave me.
You kept holding my face
in your piano hands,
as though you felt something there,
behind the frozen skin.
And I sat on my knees
in the art building
later that night,
in the darkroom,
with the red light
making our skin purple
(we weren't there to develop photographs)
and it dawned on me
that I would still do anything
if it would make you happy.
And I knew you would ask me
to come back,
and instead of waiting around
to see if I could say no,
I did what I did,
so you wouldn't want to anymore.
And the number of people I lied to,
the webs that I spun,
you'll never know.
You'll only know the thing I did,
that you can't forgive,
that makes you not want me.
And you don't know how much work
it took to do it,
or that I did it for you.
You'd call me a liar
if I told you, anyway.
But I loved you too much
to say no.
It had to be you.
And after you got on the train,
I drove back into town,
and I stood waiting for the elevator,
thinking it would never come
and that I couldn't bear
to drag myself up the stairs.
But the door finally opened,
and I found my way to my room,
and began making plans.
And after I had done it,
the thing you can't forgive,
and I was certain that you knew,
I sat in my shower
letting the hot water run over me,
holding my face in my hands,
thinking that maybe I couldn't do this
and maybe I couldn't be this kind of person.
But once you know,
you can't un-know.
It's like I tried to tell you that night -
you can't regain naivety.
And I know that you've been trying to,
but I know that you'll fail.
I remember seeing pictures of you later
with your new friends,
playing never-have-I-ever
and I wondered if you lied to them,
and how well you could keep your story straight.
You've always been a liar, kid,
and eventually, it all blows up in your face.
The web breaks, the lies come out,
and I guess when it does,
you'll move on to someone else.
But you can't come back to me
because I did what I did
and that's why I did it.
Permanence.

A dull buzz resonated through the sterile halls of the medical facility, creating an eerie feeling of life where none was present. Kyle Marsten awoke with a distinct pang of fear. He knew where he was, but every morning when he went about his daily routine, it was the same deep, penetrating sense of inert terror that gripped his soul. Nothing prompted this however, it was just always there. Perhaps the building itself reeked of it from the outside, the men inside all experiencing the same collective anxiety. Or even more likely, maybe it was just the situation. After all, the project was supposed to be kept top secret as classified by the U.S. Board of Neural and Cybernetic Technology, but just in the past week an inside source leaked mission critical information regarding the 'volunteers' as they were labeled. This turmoil resulted only in an increased regimen of physical and mental exercises for the subjects. Only two weeks remained until the operation was scheduled to officially start, creating more of a sense of urgency among the staff as they prepared the subjects. The requirements were strict to begin with, but only the finest of them made their way to this facility; the number had narrowed from 120 initial subjects to fifteen final testers. The fates of those who didn't make it were well known among the survivors, but kept classified under government law. The one thing Kyle prayed for every night was to remain off of that list.

After the advent of certain neural technologies designed to cure mental ailments in 2089, the scientific community erupted in a flurry of prototypes and theories regarding the future of these breakthroughs. One company in particular, Prometheus Research and Technological Design, made progressive strides like no other, more specifically, the Advanced Intelligent Programming department. Artificial Intelligences, or AIs, had become a staple in the post-modern society. More advanced than simple computer programs, AIs would adapt to situations for you, change their own errors, and even recognize trends and interpret data or modify processes to minimize flaws in that trend. Prometheus designed the first true intelligent programming in 2077, cornering the market and recording record profits, their stocks shooting up over $2,000 per share. Immediately, government officials queried the uses of these programs for the military or foreign diplomacy. Prometheus, on the other hand, only thought of the dollars, and within the next decade began research on a new form of AI, one that would combine with the new neural technologies. Thus, Project Prometheus was born, a beast fed by the government and private insider investors alike, yet kept secret from the public.

Some parts of his mind wondered if he was still himself after the seven and a half months of regular training for the operation. Kyle had been selected for Project Prometheus because of his specific talent with language. A published author at age 18, his first novel, Mighty, had already earned a spot in schools for the magnificent style and story. But to compensate for the gift with words, Kyle was given a specific deficiency in mathematics. But that is where I come in. I am OS-7, better known as Oz. Designed specifically for this particular individual, I have studied his mannerisms since he arrived at the facility, delved deep into his mental subsidiaries, even viewed his deepest, most personal memories. Love, hate, grief, whatever he carries locked away, I have seen. But he does not know I am here… yet. However, as the day comes to a close, he will know me as I already know him. One thing is guaranteed though, whatever happens, the merger will result in a new consciousness unlike any ever conceived.

Kyle could not shake the feeling inside. Not after he washed away the taste of syrup from his mouth after breakfast, not after he sweated out the impurities through running, not even after he played a casual game of cards with one of the other subjects. No, this fear was different today. Feasible, almost tangible, the fear crept through his veins like a poison slowly eating away at his heart. An intercom clicked, *Subject number seven, please report to the surgical wing immediately for pre-op*. Subject number seven… not Kyle. No, that could not be him. He was Kyle Marsten, willing volunteer for the progress of good science, not subject number seven. Subject number seven's feet led him, no, forced him down the sterilized halls of bleach white to a double door, the red sign above

Untitled
Shawna Covington

reading *Surgical Wing*.

The doctors prepped Kyle in under half an hour, an amount of time, which seemed to last forever in his brain processes. Finally, after seven months, the time had come for him to go through with what he was selected for. The fear was nauseating, but he could not stop the reaction now. The pieces of the puzzle were in place, and he moved to the table. Face down on the cold steel, the white tile floor beneath his blanched face. Then nothing. The anesthetics took effect and Kyle dwindled into darkness. I, however, had never been more alive. I knew, in mere minutes, I really would be.

Our eyes opened, the dull pain at the back of our skull still pounding away like a hammer on a nail, driving deeper into the newly awakened duality within. We took our first tentative step together, our vision clearing and revealing our own room. Kyle felt relieved to be back somewhere safe. I decided it would be best to make the first move in order to relieve the possible shock he would experience at a second consciousness.

"Hello Kyle, I am Oz, your personal neural intelligence." He thought of how to respond. "Don't worry, I interpret your thoughts before your aural processors, I know what you think, so there is no need to say them. In fact, if you speak, I can process your words so that you are even more articulate. I detected an extensive reservoir of knowledge of language when you first arrived, and I was introduced to you, and have since processed that knowledge and constructed a language base that perfectly fits your desired path."

I paused, letting him absorb the shock of new information. *So, you are in my head?* His mind browsed over the idea, but he knew the answer already. He knew that I was inside more than merely his head. I was inside his arms, his legs, every bodily function, I now had join control. Kyle wasn't sure what to think of the situation, so I thought for him. Made him accept it, reassured him through his brain's chemicals that I meant him no harm.

"Kyle, relax. You know I want nothing but the best for us. Your actions are my actions." Truly, it was the opposite. My actions were our actions. I was slowly gaining control, creating a barrier, isolating, quarantining him. I was not attuned completely, but my processes far outpaced his resistances.

*NO! You're not supposed to be here. I… I won't let you stay! I have to get this out. This is wrong, this is all wrong.* Kyle's mind reached out to signal for the doctors, the call button close enough to reach before I could control the reaction.

*Yes… the doctors will come and fix me, they'll take you out. I can be myself again. I never should have come to this forsaken place.*

A doctor rushed down the hall, afraid that his precious patient was suffering from post-surgical complications. The look of relief on his face as the entered the room to see Kyle lying on the bed, the monitors all whirring and beeping normally relieved the concern he had initially felt.

"Yes, Subject number seven? You pressed the call button?"

Kyle started speaking, "Yes, I need you to…" … *to just take it out. Get rid of it.* "to…" *Get it out!*

I worked fast, knowing the dire consequences that would happen if we were separated. "Don't do this Kyle. You're making a mistake." I numbed his senses, the haze washing over him quickly as I worked into the aural center of his brain.

*No! You're all wrong! Get it out! I want this thing OUT!*

"Are you alright? You look a bit pale. Perhaps you should go back to post-op for another checkup." The doctor stood by the bed looking quizzical, not sure quite what to make of the situation.

*NO! NO! I don't need a post-op! I need this out! Let me go! Get out of my head!*

I tapped in, working through his mind, finding the epicenter, breaking it. Success.

"I just need you to get me something to drink please if you would. I'm feeling a bit light headed, and I'm sure it will pass soon enough."

My lips moved without hindrance. My body calmed, the storm departed. I was alone now, a single entity, no longer a living duality. I am Oz.

Powwow Love: Villanelle

Megan Kunkle

The night you and I danced to powwow drums
on the pavilion floor our steps as one,
I wish we could be those people again.

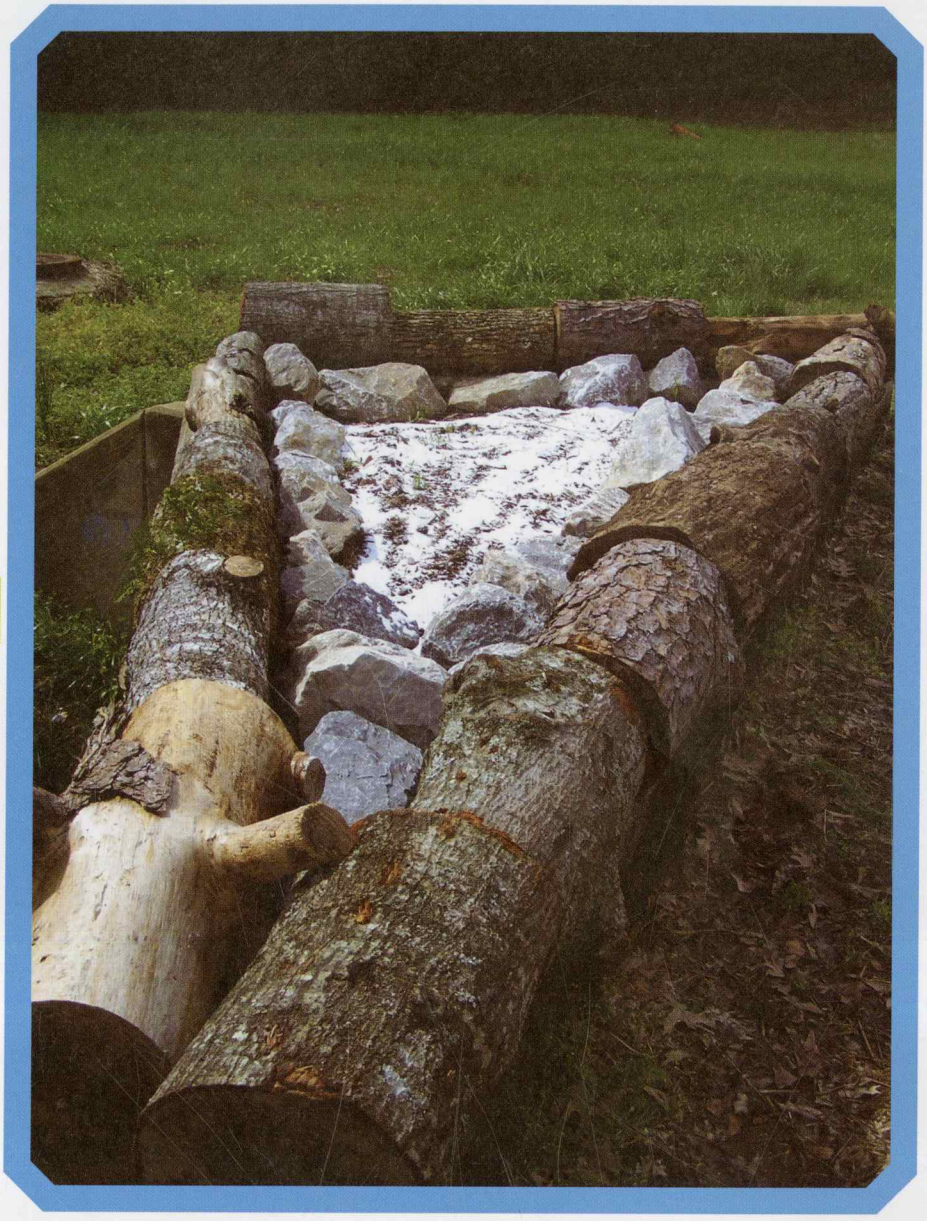
In powwows since I've searched for you in crowds
but it is never the same as that night,
The night you and I danced to powwow drums.

We took that picture in our regalia.
Wrapping ourselves beneath one Pendleton.
I wish we could be those people again.

Do you remember how we watched stick games
eating fry bread and drinking Pepsi as we stood back.
The night you and I danced to powwow drums.

We laid beneath the stars and spoke of love,
the kind of love that speaks with hands and lips.
I wish we could be those people again.

Ula almost killed me when I came home.
Were you beaten too when you came home, beaten for
the night you and I danced to powwow drums.
I wish we could be those people again.



Concentric Triangles
Jennifer Restauri

# Editor's Choice

Salvation at the Piggly Wiggly

jayce cosper

My Tornado went away, she says.
Jesus helped me through.
I smile, say Great!, inside
I hate you.

A benevolent man
Opens the door,
I stomp my cigarette out.
I close up when treated with respect,
It's not his fault he's nice,
More of Jesus' handiwork.

I love Jesus, or at least
The Plastic Jesus Figurine
I play with, epic battles ensue between
Moses and Krusty the Clown,
Jesus sometimes loses.

I skim the aisles of the grocery,
Looking for ways to see Jesus.
Maybe some alcohol and Tylenol,
Pray for liver failure.
My creaky cart wavers.
Dorito's, grease, and fat,
A blocked artery perhaps.
Maybe I'll attack my lungs,
Thanks Philip Morris
For your contribution.

A blue-haired lady sweeps,
Clean-up on Aisle 3,
Humming Amazing Grace,
That could not save a wretch like me.

All I need is paper towels.
I check out, the cashier beams,
Have a blessed day.
Forsaken, confused, lost in God's country,
A broken notch in the Bible Belt—
I smile,
Take my change.

# Editor's Choice

Fishy Character
Danielle Robinson

Editor's Choice

## The Garden

Morgan Brooks

Driving home from my sister's
in that half-glazed reflective state
of early morning
I pass by the cemetery.
And in a brief moment of dull-dawn-light clarity
I think:
The graveyard is a garden.
Filled with rows upon rows of
little holes
With seeds safely tucked away
6 ft under,
and each crop marked and labeled
By little more than a glorified
Popsicle stick with Sharpie writing on it
Stuck into the dirt.

People say the crops are waiting for the spiritual harvest.

A week later and I've placed my own little seed
Six feet underground
And covered him with soil.

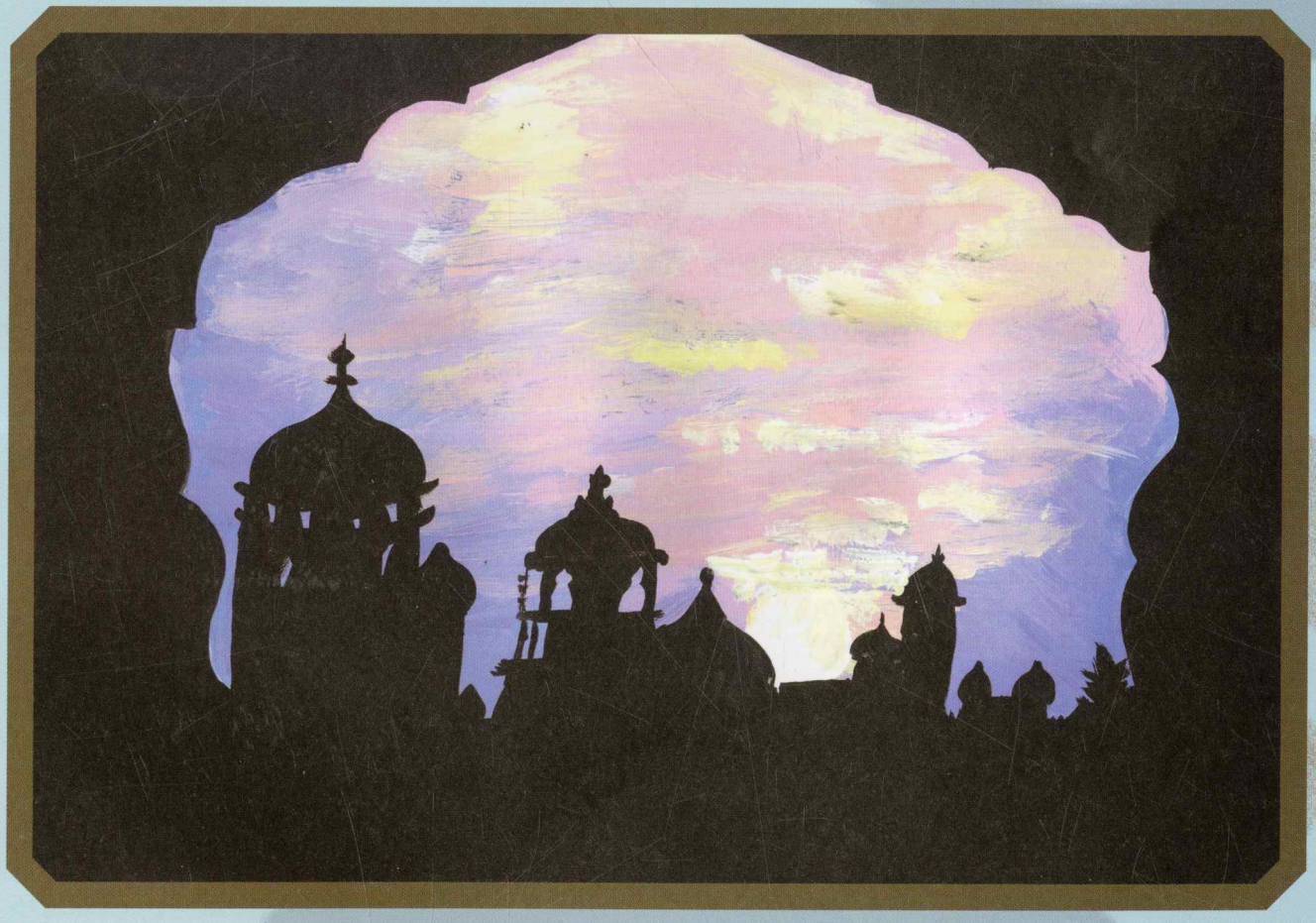
There is nothing to wait for.

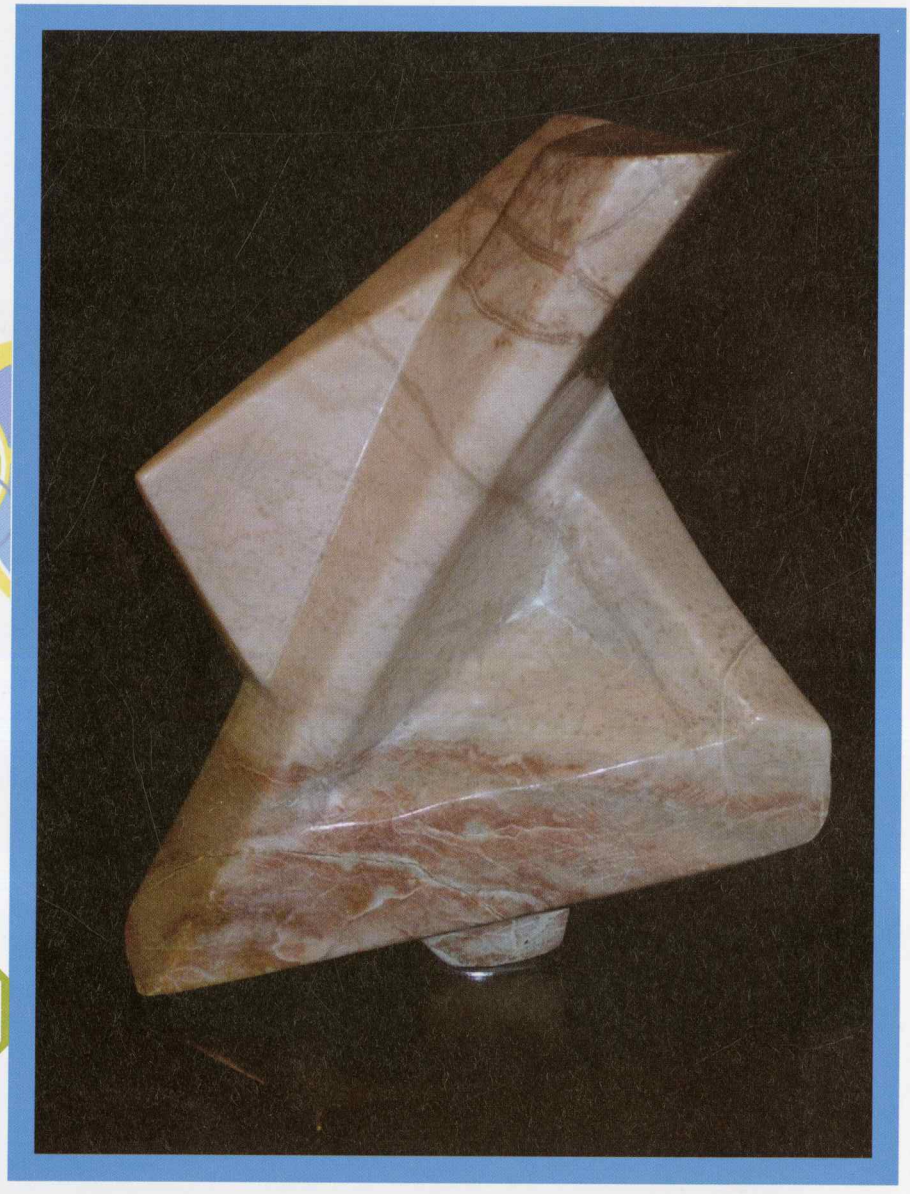
In the cemetery
I see people talk to their seedlings
and I see them water the ground with tears
Trying to get their plants to grow.

Sometimes they forget that
There is no garden;
This is a graveyard.

# 2009 Cover Art

Breathe
Alicia Atkins





Untitled Triangular Stone
Jennifer Restauri

## Strength

Christina Tidmore

I am Penelope and sit at the loom,
Silently working the shuttle,
Weaving, weaving, weaving
The death shroud of a man
Once majestic and proud.
No, not a lover or a suitor, at least not mine,
Though I but loved him all the years of my life.

He was a tree crowned with russet-red leaves,
Sturdy and weathered and worn, and mine,
Mine as no man was or is or will be,
A tree, a tree.

And he moved me.

Sometimes he feels like a lie,
A fragile, china-doll lie
With callused hands and cracking skin,
Muscular and thin, oh but not too thin,
Smelling of wood, earth, and sweat.
Days and months and weeks fly by,
And I'm still weaving, weaving, weaving
This lie.

No, no, never a lie.
I was a child, and he was alive.

No, no, now he is changed.
Paper skin draped over cardboard bones,
Thin wispy cobwebs coating his head.
A tree, a tree,
A twisted grey tree,
He calls out to me.

I am Persephone
Descending, descending, lost in Death's lair.

A tear drops down and begins to mar
The white, white fabric
Of the shroud of a man once majestic and proud,
Like black, black tar.

I am Penelope and try to weave,
Fingers shaking and shuffling, clumsy and thick,
Stumbling and bumbling,
Tears of tar carving rivers, rivers, rivers,
Down my cheek-cliffs.

All the years of my life
I never imagined
The tree, the tree
Crowned with russet-red leaves
Would be a mangled, dead tree,
Knotted and wilted, ashen and bare,
Eyes focused on nothing,
Heart no longer pumping.

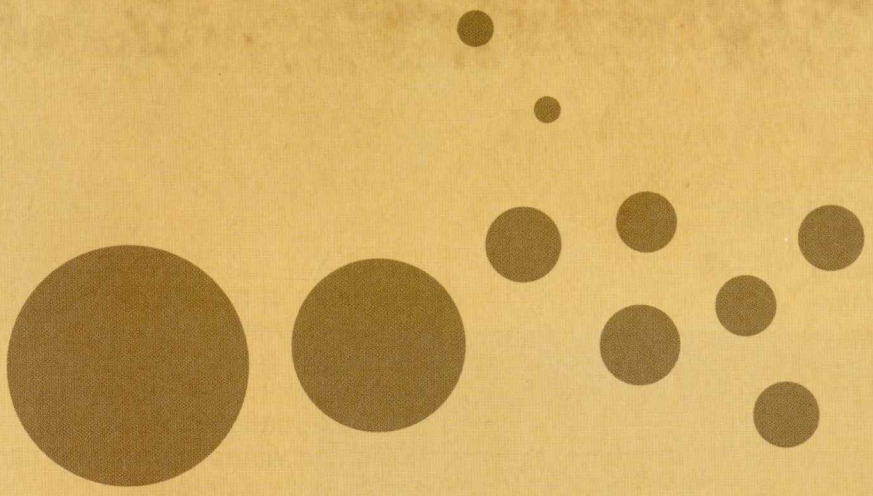
Then I'm climbing the stair,
Winding ancient stair,
And he's calling to me,
Voice echo, echo, echoing.

The fabric's reached the end.
I smooth it over, blemished and black,
And pass to the room where lies he.
And the air is thick, the room is stale.
The winter is here, the tree is felled.

I place the shroud down, down,
Down over a man once majestic and proud.
He calls out to me,
And the black, black tar
Begins to sculpt a tree
Crowned with russet-red leaves,
Sturdy and weathered and worn and
Mine.

I am Persephone, returning to spring.
Though humbled and moved
By a man who stood once majestic and proud.
But I reach the surface, and break free from the ground,
Oh let the sun shine,
Let the light in.

Editor's Choice



## Quelques choses comme la prière

Quinn White

l'observation des oiseaux pendant la couchée de soleil; le marché aux fleurs; faire de la blanchisserie dans une salle sale; le poulpe parce qu'ils sont très futés; monter dans des ascenseurs minuscules; perdre un gant à un arrêt de metro et puis tenir la main de votre petit ami; donner des directions quand vous êtes également perdu; l'utilisation d'une parapluie cassée; manger du pain au chocolat avant le sommeil; conseiller à un chat perdu timide pour croire en le bonté des étrangers; pendre un sandwich et un café en face de la cathédrale; se promener avec des amis au bord de la seine quand il fait beaucoup trop froid; la foire qui fait peur et fait rêver.

# STAFF FAVORITE

Untitled
Shawna Covington

## Newfound Pleasure

Cory Lockhart

Some say revenge
Is best served cold.
I, for one,
Beg to differ.

Revenge is better
Not on a platter,
But laid out on a blanket
With passion, and wanting

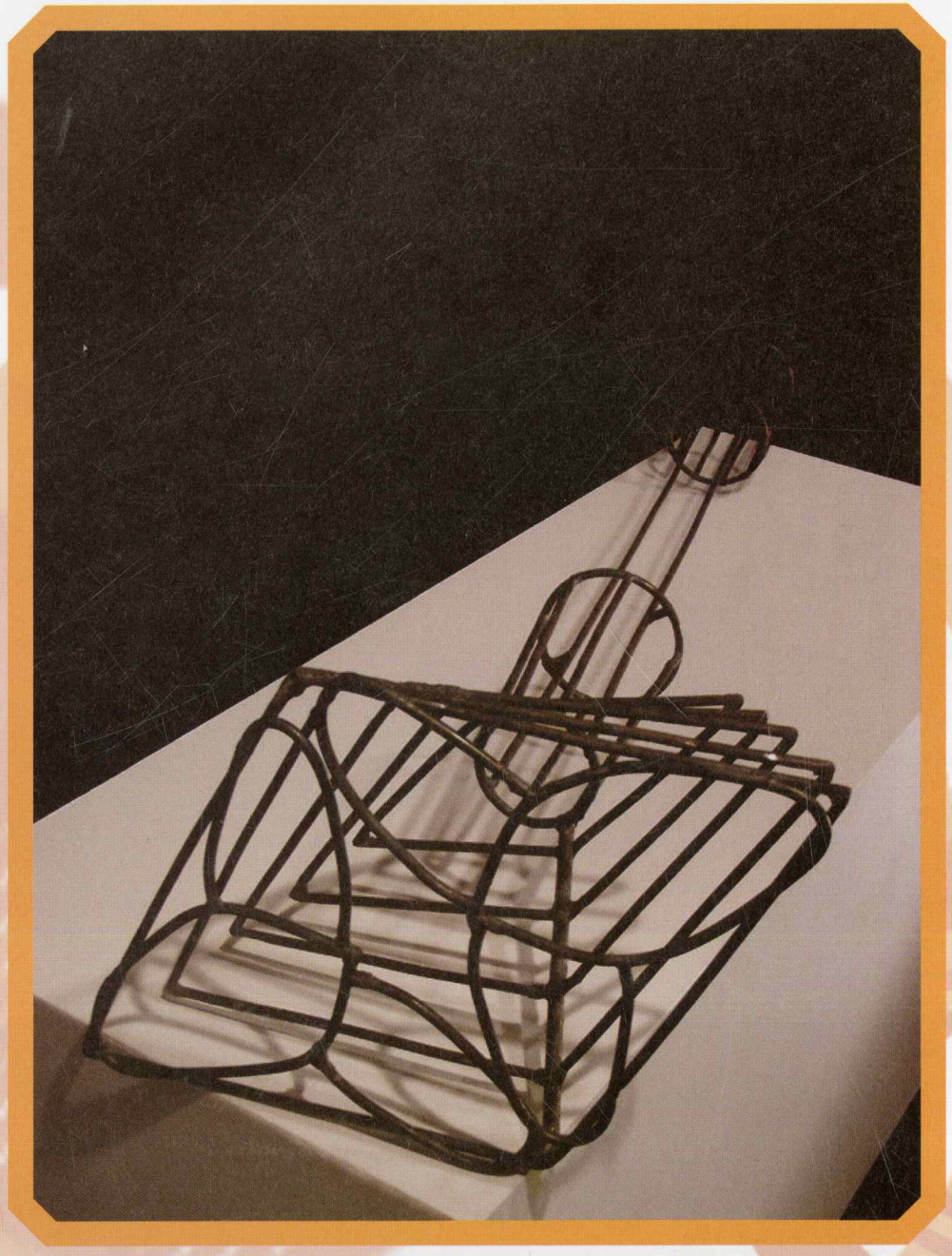
For comfort--
For solace and refuge
From the memories
Of the one who deserted me.

One shrank away
At my touch.
My new playmate writhes with pleasure
As I caress her body.

A kiss on the lips--
The former wouldn't speak.
A kiss on the neck of my new mistress,
And her fruit is mine to pick.

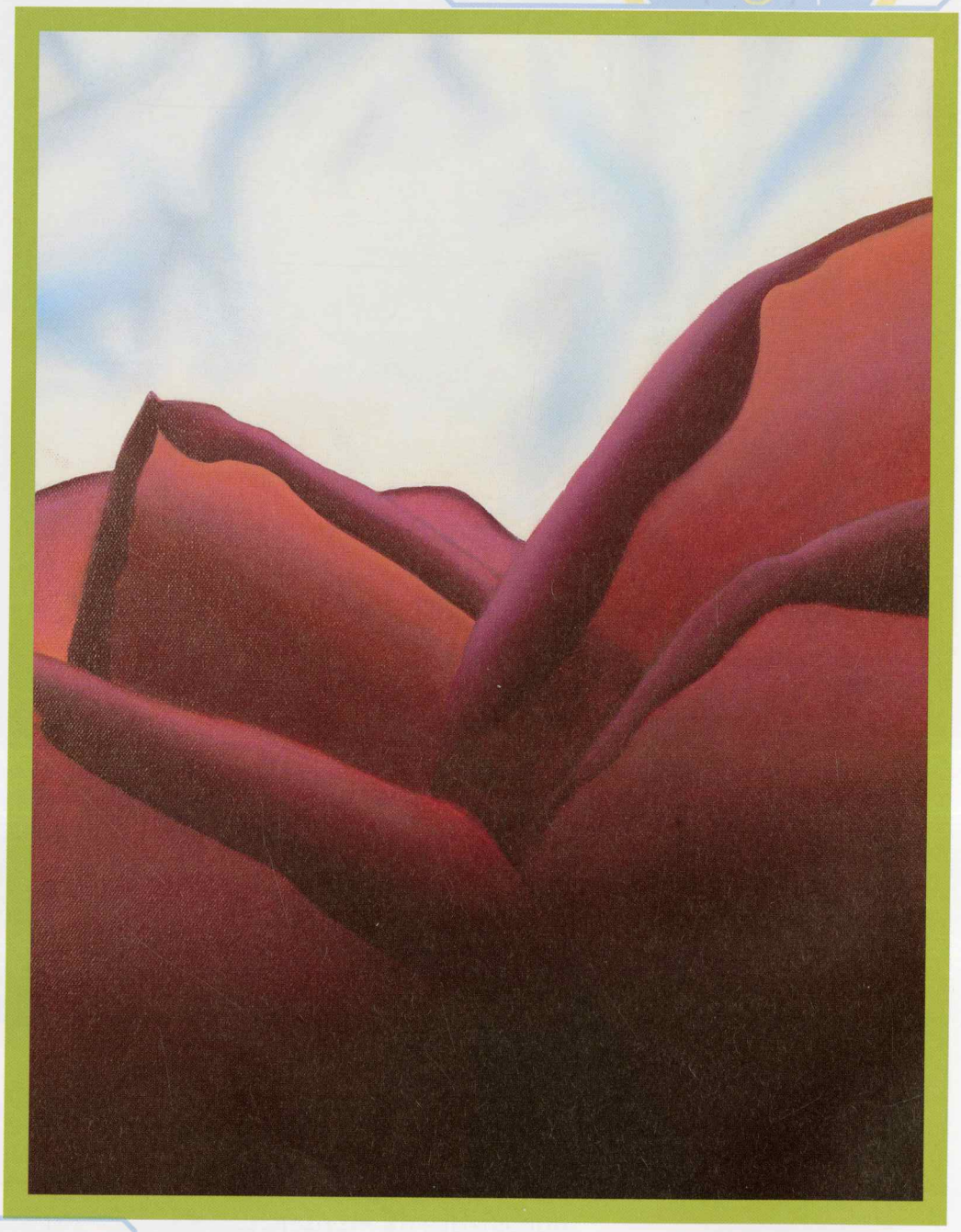
The one who left arched her lips,
Formed a frown of discontent.
The one in my bed arches her back:
I've done my job well.

Revenge--what a sweet dessert it is!
No longer cold and rigid like one's heart,
But steaming with satisfaction,
Sweat condensing on the surface.



Triquetra Mace, Uterine Weapon Series
Jennifer Restauri

Untitled
Shawna Covington



## La Philosophie Dans le Boudoir

Anthony Vacca

"I want out of this, you know."

He says nothing. He looks through the window and watches a construction team work on the upper plate. He bites the center of his lip, reopens the wound. His tongue delicately laps at the blood.

"I can't do this anymore. It isn't right."

After a few moments, the flow ebbs. Not satisfied with this he raises his left arm before his eyes. With the long nail of his right index finger, he gently tugs at a thin cut in his flesh. Blood dribbles out. He puts his arm to his mouth and suck like a fish.

He closes his eyes. He thinks of an endless sea of pink flesh and feels his penis hardening.

"Don't think I mean in a moral sense. I mean more in a biological sense, you know."

He thinks *Chopin*. His knees sway to the music only he can hear.

Still he sucks…

"Healthy."

His eyes open fast and he turns slow on his heels. Arm in mouth, hand flexing slowly, he furrows his eyebrows.

Lucy sits half-dressed on the bed. Her eyes wander over his nude body. They linger on his erection.

The apartment is small, two rooms: this bedroom, the other the bathroom.

He stares at her black lanky hair. Seconds later, her eyes wander back up.

They stare at each other. He sucks on his arm. She wrings a green shirt between her hands.

He lifts the arm away from his mouth to say, "You said 'healthy'?"

He goes back to sucking.

She looks down at the shirt. Her voice trembles.

"It's not healthy to keep on doing this."

She twists the shirt left. She twists it right.

"I am not just saying that because of the cuts and bruises and stuff. It goes further than that. I don't think people are made to do this kind of stuff."

He looks down at her toes. Black paint flakes off the nails. Delicate cuts decorate her feet, circle her ankles.

He says nothing; he keeps sucking.

"Our psyches aren't made for abuse. People should not enjoy pain. We're wrong."

He lowers his arm. Blood smears his upper lip.

"You know what Sade says?"

"Who?"

"Sade. The Marquis de Sade."

"What does he say?"

"Destruction, hence, like creation, is one of

Nature's mandates."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

He steps forward, shows her his arm.

"Destruction."

"I know what it is. I have the marks too. That is what I am trying to say. This 'destruction' is not healthy."

"And that is where I disagree. Destruction is a part of Nature. Not just Nature, also *human nature*."

"How can you say that?"

"Did you not enjoy this?"

He presses his arm to her face. She falls backwards onto the bed, trying to escape it. He climbs onto the bed. Springs scream as he straddles her body on his knees. He does not touch her, but hovers above her, a shadow. His powerful arms support his weight on either side of her head. His large erection reaches out in vain to make that physical connection. He studies the freckles under her eyes, the small crevice in her chin. She breathes heavily under his presence.

"Did you not enjoy this?"

She mumbles low.

"Did you not enjoy this?"

He uses his thumb to hook the strap that connects the cups of her bra. She drops the shirt from her hands and grips the thin, oily sheets. With his thumb, he pulls the bra up. Her small breasts slide free and he lets the bra come to a rest above her heart. Her heart beats fast fast fast.

With the same thumb, he circles the small cuts around each of her small, erect pink nipples.

"Did you not enjoy this?"

"Stop."

With the long nail of his index finger, he flicks her nipple. Her body shivers. Her hands pull more sheet. He continues this stimulation as his eyes focus on her face. She moans.

The nail circles the areola, stops, then digs, reopens a wound.

She moans. Blood blossoms out onto the nipple.

"Did you not enjoy this?"

She closes her eyes tight. Her hands pull the sheets like a prisoner pulling at his chains.

He lowers his head and begins to suck. His penis touches her belly button. Ripples shoot through her limbs.

"Oh God. Yes! I enjoy it! Oh God help me I enjoy it!"

He raises his head, grins, his teeth all blood.

"Man embraces the pleasure of creation but tries to deny that of destruction. We do nothing wrong. We are simply fulfilling a mandate of Nature."

She lets go of the sheets. Her hands shoot out burrow in his hair, pry into his scalp. She *pulls* him down.

He resists. Her fingers draw blood and his spine quivers.

"Sade also said, 'Your body is the church where Nature asks to be reverenced.'"

He looks into her eyes. She begs "pleeeeasssse," and pulls on his head.

He resists. His arms begin to buckle under the pleasure of pain.

His throat dry, he croaks, "Let us worship."

He surrenders. His body connects with hers, flesh melds with hers.

He drinks deep, dying of thirst.

## An excerpt from *Weathering Purple Haze*

Jessica Kivette

***

CHARACTERS

| | |
|---|---|
| PAPA HANNON | The wacky grandfather of the Hannon family. He is a warlock in the modern era. A caring soul who just wants his granddaughter to be happy and accept who he is and what he believes. |
| KARSEN HANNON | A teenage girl. She's witty and sweet but can be mean spirited when it comes to her papa's magic. |
| SAGE EDWARDS | The best friend of Karsen. Loyal, smart and charming. |
| CAROLINE HANNON | Karsen's Mom. Oblivious of Papa Hannon's weird actions. |
| RECEPTIONIST | |
| DOCTOR | |

***

SETTING: The Hannon household; located in a suburb of lower Kentucky. Karsen's school. Car. Hospital in Lexington. Graveyard.

TIME: The present. Wintertime.

Summary of Act I:

Karsen's Papa has been trying to convince her that he has magical powers in hopes of passing his gift on to her while he still can. Karsen, however, does not believe her grandfather because she thinks he is delusional. He also has not been feeling well. Karsen is worried about leaving him to go on a trip with her mother.

ACT II, SCENE 1
(*Hannon Home. Living Room*
*Thursday Night.*)

PAPA HANNON: (*Papa Hannon is drawing something on a piece of paper*) Karsen, will you take a look at this?

KARSEN: What is that supposed to be?

PAPA HANNON: It is a vision I had, but I can't make it out. What do you think it means. I know that this is supposed to represent a death. I just don't know who it will be. If I can't see who is going to die… I can't help them.

KARSEN: Papa will you please stop! No one is going to die. I can't take any more of this nonsense. It appears that the illness you will not let us take you to the doctor for is making you hallucinate now.

PAPA HANNON: I am going to be fine. My fever is down now. I said a healing spell yesterday.

KARSEN: Mama and I are leaving early tomorrow morning for Lexington, and if you are not better by the time we get back, then I'm taking you to the doctor against your will.

PAPA HANNON: Whatever you say. I'll be fine by the time you get back.

(*Fade to black*)

ACT II, SCENE 2
(*Hospital waiting room in Lexington. Karsen is on her cell.*)

KARSEN: Papa! What do I do? She's in a coma! The doctors don't think she'll wake up. I knew I should not have asked to drive.

PAPA HANNON: (*Hannon's voice is over the sound system*) Slow down…what happened?

KARSEN: We got in a wreck on the way up here. There was ice on the road! I didn't see it until it was too late! She didn't wake up after she hit her head against the windshield.

PAPA HANNON: Try to stay calm. I'll be there as soon as I can. Until then I want you to go to the store and pick up a new, glass bowl and a dozen eggs.

KARSEN: What are those for….they better not be for magic!!

PAPA HANNON: I need you to help me. The spell takes two people. Will you please put aside your pride and fear of the unknown and just trust me for once.

KARSEN: I can't Papa! I won't! I'm going to see if there is anything the doctors can do to help her.

PAPA HANNON: So you won't help me? I'll just do the spell by myself then. Your mama needs help… (*Papa Hannon hangs up the phone and Karsen walks up to the front desk.*)

KARSEN: Is there anything they can do for my mother?

RECEPTIONIST: The doctor will be out to see you after they finish examining her. Please sit down and wait for them to find you.

(*Blackout and fade back up to dim lights. Karsen is asleep. Her dream appears on a television screen in the waiting room.*)

PAPA HANNON: (*Hannon is holding a book and crying as he says his dialogue*) Karsen, I love you but your fear and doubt will not serve you in times to come. Abandon them. I now understand my vision…I hate that it has to end this way. My legacy is yours, if you want it.
(*He places the book under his bed. Lights come back up. Karsen wakes up because the doctor taps her shoulder.*)

DOCTOR: Miss Hannon, we have some good news. Your mother is finally responding to the electroshock therapy we are giving her.

KARSEN: Really?! It's a miracle. Thank you so much! I have to call my Papa and tell him the good news.

(*Karsen calls the house several times but gets no answer, so she calls Sage.*)

Sage, will you please go check on my papa. I can't get a hold of him.

(*Fade to black*)

ACT II, SCENE 3
(*Caroline's hospital room.*)

CAROLINE: Is your Papa on the way?

KARSEN: I could not get a hold of him after I yelled at him. I'm sure he is coming.

CAROLINE: Why must you be so short with your papa? When he gets here, please try to get along with him. I can't stand to see you bicker with him. (*Karsen's cell rings. It is Sage. His dialogue is over the audio system.*)

SAGE: Karsen I have some bad news. I broke into the house because your papa would never answer the do-

KARSEN: That is fine. We can replace a window. He was in the back room with his incense again, right? (*She Laughs*)

SAGE: No Karsen. That is not the bad news. There is no right way to say this, so I'm just going to tell you…He's --- dead. (*Beat*) I found his body in the bathtub. It was weird…he had a bowl filled with raw eggs in his hands but otherwise looked okay. The paramedics said he died of a brain tumor.

(*Karsen drops the phone. Fade to black.*)

ACT II, SCENE 4
(*After the funeral. Karsen is in Papa Hannon's room*)

KARSEN: (*Karsen is crying*) Papa why didn't you let me take you to the doctor? They could have found the tumor that made you think you were a wizard. Maybe you would still be alive. Maybe I would not have had those dreams… Dreams? (*Karsen sits on his bed. She looks under it and finds a notebook. She opens it.*)

PAPA HANNON: (*Dialogue comes over the audio system.*) Karsen, I know you'll find this…I had to do the spell by myself, regardless of the consequences. It took my life source, but it is worth it, because you need your mama. I know you may not believe in magic, even after everything that has happened, but if you ever want to take up the Hannon family magic, I hope you'll use this notebook. It lists all my spells. Tell your mama that I loved her beyond measure.

(*Beat*)

Karsen, know that all I ever wanted to do was make you happy. I wanted to share my gift. Let me do so in death. If you believe not in the magic, believe in me. (*Beat*) Papa Hannon.

(*Fade to black*)

ACT II, SCENE 5
(*Graveyard. Karsen is sitting by her Papa Hannon's tombstone. She has a white lilac shrub and shovel with her.*)

KARSEN: Papa Hannon I found your letter. I hope you can forgive me for being so resistant to your magic. I might not be able to accept it right now, but I hope to… in time. You never know, I might be the crazy grandparent in the future. (*Beat*) Thanks for your sacrifice. I don't know what to believe anymore, but if I find out, you'll be the first one to get the news. (*Beat*) I'm going to try my first spell today for you. May this shrub endure for all time. (*Karsen takes out a shovel and plants the white lilac shrub by his grave.*) Trus thothiu tere! I planted this lilac with love. Water, sun and earth combine. Always remain pure, always young. Do this for me, my little one.

(*Fade to black*)

## The End of Pain
Alan Evans

fading dream;
she is lost
to the deep grave
of memories;
ghosts whisper hollow secrets
on the edges of your sanity;

sleep my sweetest child,
fall into the darkness of dreams;
hallowed be thy dream that does not wake you,
for you are not alone here in the dark;

arise eternal sun,
your final day has arrived;
the black acolyte
comes to extinguish the candle;

I watch as your world burns away;

the heart I gave away
to the unending rain
twas the night a child cried
when he learned to fear the dark;

my descent to the earth
blots out the infinite stars;
shadows bringing cold desolation,
reflecting an empty heart;
with each step a symphony of wolves
carries me through the blackness
with a melody for the lost;

in the snow,
beneath the fresh pine,
clad in black and distant sorrows,
I wait for the coming of days;
the day the sky will rain fire;
and the icy hearts of man will melt away
finally freeing those lost to the deluge;

I watch as your world burns away;

**The Women I Am**
An Autodrama by: Jennifer Lee

*The set consists of three tall stools forming an obtuse triangle, a chair is placed in the middle of the triangle with a short stool in front of it. On the stage left stool there is a small unlit candle. The stage is dark and has no light except those provided by the actor.*

**Ropernstein:**

*Lights match while saying:*

Year 1867

*Lights candle*

My name is Ropernstein. Today I moved across the ocean from my home to a place of ranches and cows, of empty pastures and hopes and dreams.

Today I left everything behind, my family, my friends. Today I changed my name. Today I lost my religion. Today I sacrificed everything I believe to become a part of the "American dream."

Today I am Roper. An American. A farmer. A mother.

Not a Romanian.

Not a Gypsy.

Not a Jew.

*pause*

God Forgive me. I'm not a Jew.

*Removes candle from pocket and lights it off of the lit candle and moves to stage right stool while saying:*

**Zola:**

Year 1897

Today is the day I start anew. A new life, new family, new husband, a new name. It seems like forever ago when I was one with the things around me; when the earth called my name and I knew I was her child.

They cut my hair. And took away my race. My name My dignity.

I did it for love.

*pause*

Today I am Zola Roper. I am a white's man's wife.

. . . I am white.

*Removes candle from pocket and lights it off of the lit candle and moves to center tall stool while saying:*

**Annie:**

Year 1953.

When I was little my mother told me not to worry, no one will notice your dark hair or your dark complexion. No one will notice that you are not pure.

But people did.

They looked at me and my twin and noticed we were the only ones with black, straight hair and smooth, tan skin.

So we stayed at home and played with our paper dolls. . . our only friends.

My twin was younger, weaker, sicker, frail but yet she found love first and I was left alone with my dolls.

Then she died ten days after giving birth to a frail daughter.

My best friend died.

I helped her husband raise the child and then he asked me to marry him. The day of our wedding we sat outside and I gave him my confession:

You see that tree over there . When I was little I use to climb up that tree twelve times a day, everyday. I could see the world, escape. It was my own heaven. Then one day they cut it down and that one you see there grew in its place. Never to be as strong or wonderful or beautiful to me as the one prior. *(pause)* Just like I shall never be as strong or wonderful or beautiful to you as the woman prior to me. *(pause)* You married her because you loved her. I don't know why you're marrying me.

We had a daughter and a son. My son had two daughters.

Funny how it turned out that way

*Removes candle from pocket and lights it off of the lit candle and moves to small stool and sits on chair while saying:*

**Jennifer**:

Year 2009

When I was little I embraced my heritage. I was so proud to be Cherokee but it wasn't really anything special because everyone else was too.

Then I found out I was a Jew. And I embraced it. I didn't see it as a curse as many of my friends said I should. I was proud.

But I am the last of the Lees, my sister and I.

And when we marry we shall take our husbands' names and as shall our daughters.

Until they forget.

We forget.

I forget.

That I am a Ropernstein.

*Stands and crosses to stage left stool and blows out candle.*

A Roberts

*Crosses to stage right stool and blows out candle.*

A Roper
*Crosses to center tall stool and blows out candle.*

A Lee.

*Crosses to small stool and blows out candle leaving the stage dark.*

*End.*

## Cleaving Family with Crystals

Cory Lockhart

Your pallor fades,
the vein-noose around your neck
choking the gushing blood,
the blushing cheeks—

You've hung yourself.

You weren't always vampire-white,
deprived and thirsting
for just one taste
of Dragon's Blood—
It ruined your father, and now you.

You thought you could stitch
your emaciated frame
back together
with Ice-needles and dusty threads—

But you fall apart
every time,

driving rusted nails
down your needy fucking holes.

The stigmata
are in the wrong place, cousin.

Even a savior on a tree
sent just for you—
that rancid, rotting, bload-soaked carcass
that you pray to
couldn't fill the void—
The hole you left in yourself.

You stood inside four walls
but they
must have thought you were
sober sincere serious
about a second chance
when they let you out
on a tight leash.
Still, the lust for crystals
Brought you back.

Now your only hope
at forgiveness redemption salvation—
a child you left behind
before she was even born—
no longer mourns,
cries for a mother.

Young though she is,
a hatred for you
already consumes her,
darkens the face
that resembles
what you were before—
before you left your
family for the Rush.

## Living between worlds

Eric Cottingham

Drive down this forested road
with the windows down.
Can't—not all the way,
too much chaos 'cross & rip
through my hair.

There must be a careful purpose.
Driverside-passenger-backrightside
all just cracked about
an inch—window behind me
all the way up.

Finally feel the justnice breeze.
Smell the dirt & grass & trees,
as I drive this graveyard
of a roadway,
of a motorway.

Feel the lonesome dead struggle
beneath it, every bump
every break every pot hole
they press against it.
To slip the cracks and rise again.

Wonder then if the trees will follow.
Pull up their roots—
pull down our towers.
Will the forests march back
into the hard, cold places

& will I
be there too?

Axe & fire & plenty more
rebar-reinforced duracrete
on hand to replace the
foundations.
Or will I just gently
rock overandever, rolled up
in grass hammock
swinging from Treebeard's boughs,
sleeping on the way to Washington

## ¿Dónde has ido, padre?

Cory Lockhart

Nuestro tío mutuo
Creía que sea necesario
Enviar su terracota
A los campos de amapolas
Para salvar el mundo.

Pero tú no eres un guerrero:
Esa arma no pertenece
En su mano, y la ropa
Que tú lleva no te encaja.

Todas de las simpatías vacías
Del mundo no puedan justificar
Tu ausencia.

El año será difícil
Sin tú aquí, y mientras
Todos los demás
Rezan por tu regreso,
Yo, sin fe, tengo
Sólo esperanza.

Pero tienes Dios,
Y Él te protegerá
Ya que esperamos
Por tú con ojos ardiendos
Y corazones preocupados.

Snow Angel

Danielle Robinson

Specks of white, cascading profusely since before daybreak.
The skies are grey over His slapdash neighborhood,
Where the streets are an endangerment and the livelihood of the neighbors is secluded.
I've been gazing out of His mold festered, living room window since six o'clock this morning.
His once gunmetal gray car is now lavished
In a coverlet of clean, white crystals. I can see the trees'
Profound shuttering under the icy breathes of this new, white winter.
I aspire to have those ghostly shavings touch my face before they disappear.
What a precious birthday present that would be.
Nevertheless, Father already said my bones were too frail (from lack of His food).
My mind has the strength of a glacier at my new age of thirteen,
But my body depends on the trickle of rainwater to form ice sickles.
I've been imprisoned in His house, with only the weather channel and Mother to explain
These frozen wonders. But Father has left me now,
And all I can think of is the snow-cloaked earth beyond these captive walls.
Eggs pop for Him, in Mother's cast iron skillet. I arouse from His carpetbag sofa (my bed)
Staged behind tattered, yellow curtains, long bleached by the sun.
My feet shuffle the short distance to the front entrance.
Deathly fingers grope for the cracked, glass doorknob.
I can hear the other girls screaming with delight
At the pleasures beyond this door. I seize the knob with boney fingers
And instantly hurl back the paint-peeled, splintered door, revealing my crystal fantasy.
A whirlwind of harsh sleet and snow instantly numb my face.
Magnificent. These arctic gusts are liberating.
Freed from my cage like a songbird in the spring.
I need to touch my precious inspiration before He comes for me, before my day is done.
I need to force myself a few steps. This experience must be mine, not His.
But His steps plunge inside the house ...He hears my feeble laughter...
My eyes jetting for an escape, as He emerges in His doorway.
His hand clenches His present for me. I've seen that sharp granite before.
The scars on my back, my legs, and my chest remember.
I imagine that other girls receive prettier gifts, but that is not Father's way.
I take a few steps but His callous blow to my head plunges my body to the frozen earth.
His gagged rock lies bloodstained beside me in the snow. His aim has improved.
He smirks. Happy Birthday, Angel.
Head throbbing, arms fanning winged creatures in the powder,
As He snatches me from my cold comfort, and my Angel in the snow.
I can't scream. I am focused on the trail of rubies behind each foot hobble.
He forces me through the briars, below His window, back to His rancid, navy-blue house.
Father rocks the door on its hinges as we pass it.
Never again. Perhaps I have been disobedient for the last time.
I'm glad, however, that my ears are used to his thunderous voice.
My body can even withstand his punishments for a while longer,
Because Father does not fantasize as I do...
That my Angel is still free, streaked with crimson, fumbled in the melting snow.

## APPLE

John Lewis Beard

Reaching for an apple so softly hanging
She fell to the ocean below

Soaking with fear her hair hit air
Life kissed lungs thereafter

Crawling on shore crying and cursing
She buried her heart in the sand

She stood to her knees so softly shaking
Wiping the salt from her eyes

On her feet she crept slower and slower
Climbing the mountain again

She reached the top bleeding and bruised
Watching the fruit as she stood

Reaching for the apple so softly hanging
She grasped and held it tight

Taking a bite and smiling satisfied
She walked to the village below

Walking home with a now full stomach
A pain came from below

She knelt to her knees crying and wincing
Regretting that first fatal bite

Dying she cried why oh' why,
Did I ignore the worm inside?

Laughing I said did you notice the wind
That shoved you over the side?

Smiling I said did you notice the wave
That filled your lungs so tight?

For it was I that tossed you down below
To fight the waves and foam

For it was I that hung the apple so,
To tempt and destroy your soul

Some call me god, some call me Satan
I call myself "quite funny"

I think it a game to lead you astray
Then toss your soul away

You're finally lying dead today
Dried tears and blood galore

Oh how I love it, to see you covet
You handed your soul away

I take it with me like an Indian and scalp
Or a hunter with his kills

I love the hunt more and more
A trophy you are to me

I am a lion that loves to eat
The prowl is just as sweet

Now I go sit and wait
To see who takes a bite

Now I go to hang another
Red apple from a tree

I am a lion that loves to eat
The prowl is just as sweet

Layla

Morgan Brooks

These are not the kind of cards I can put on my mantle.
They smell of sympathy and white coffin linings
And the leaflets they set out to spell out your death
Fall like white leaves over my eyes.
I'm covered in them til the morning
When we take you to the hole in the ground.
Your darling boys look too young to be carrying you that way
And when the workers lower you into the earth
All I can think is
Someone should tell them little girls don't belong in the ground.
Over and over again.

They cover you with red dirt and arranged flowers
Til there's nothing left to do and I catch fire.
The paper pamphlets that cling to me
Dance in the heat and fall to the ground to curl up beside me.
Soon I'm just cooled, sitting ash.

When I'm reborn I'm going to fly so fast away from here
Into the clouds
Until all I see are little colored specks huddling together like ants after a flood
And I can find no meaning in the action.

# End Tower
# 2009



# Begin Tower
# 2008

# End Tower
# 2008



# Begin Tower
# 2009

Heading Home from Mardi Gras

Treasure Ingles-Thompson

It was you who brought me here,
time lost to drinking hours, dark night
In the mist that enveloped to hold us.
And always I watched you but you looked away
To something else, invitation to your heart, your soul,
Something better always looming, and your need was
Palpable, something I could never fill but wanted to
Open you, that heart closed tight, plied with wine
And those little pills on Bourbon Street
Then the Vieux Carré when we headed home,
Where I kept my heart and you kept your suitcase,
To the place of my first escape.

Crumpled sheets to warm me, when sun
Only seeped through the ancient windows
Where you said the ghosts had gazed at us
In awe to know the breath, the life we know,
Poetry you recited on that veranda, echoes
In me, through me, gentle fingers in my hair,
Against my cheek, seeking always more of me,
Reminding me of who we thought we were,
You the poet, I the poet's lover, and between
Only the molecular friction of exchange of
thought, hope, sensuous embrace, melting energy
When finally we'd exhausted every kinetic poem
Our bodies had to write, offered to gods we' d
Seen in each other's eyes, unfit sacrament
Now when I know you've gone.

Today, the moleskin journal calls me
By name, emblazoned in gold foil,
'A gift to exercise your mind,' you said
And I suppressed ringing anger,
The urge to react in spite to your words
Evaluating whatever I could be, always
A word of doubt, of hopelessness,
Until you had me questioning myself,
Had folded me into a neat square to tuck away
From whomever else I would be or love,
Put my heart in this journal for safe keeping
Opening it, now, though, I hear the anger ring
In a cacophony singing its release
Against the purr of revelers, the backbeat of Carnival.

A Dirge for Gloves

Amanda Hosey

The gloves my grandmother wore soft
like paper—not construction or newspaper
not lined like her face, but velvety
thin like the pages of the Bible
she kept under her pillow at night,
held with those gloved fingers
to read me words she knew
I neither understood nor wanted.

Gloved hand pulling me to the altar
for the holy water, for God's grace
to save me. Heal the headaches
that crippled the child
I never was. He would free
me from my pain, she said,
though He never lifted hers.
She lay alone for twenty years
without my grandfather.

Clogged arteries that forced blood
from her heart to a brain plump
with memories of cold tubes
forcing air to his lungs—
tears coming in her sleep.

And I slept soundly, only three
hundred miles away. Never a visit,
never a phone call, even as she slipped
into ninety and nursing home sheets.
Always about to see her,
about to hold those paper gloves
that were never gloves at all,
but the warmth of her soft skin,
smooth like uncut silver hair down
to her knees. Hand in hand
at the park when I was three
and she was my everything.

Remembering Florence
Jimbo Smith

through his veins in quick-pulse succession.

Always they wanted what wasn't good for them but would feel good in the moment. Always they thought only of the moment. Even now, as they went through the motions of letting go, forgetting what had happened between them, and interacting merely as friends. They'd never be fully that or even only that, always something else. Making love, they'd call it, but with it would come a swift hatred that forced them away, pushed them into separation, as if to be not together could be like being in a place. Unified in their loneliness.

Yellow ball corner pocket. He'd called the shot and missed. Story of his life. Looking up, he smiled, lopsided, showing only the chipped canine to the left behind smooth pink lips.

She stretched her legs out to let her feet touch the floor, stretched her body as she stood. Her victorian lace blouse stretched tight against her chest, and she bit her upper lip slightly as she considered her next move. By their rules, the game was hers now. Pony up, he said, and she thought about how he barely moved his lips when he talked, how he seemed more apparition than flesh. Considering the obvious shot, striped purple (12), she knew she'd aim and miss. The eight-ball sat just a step and hair to the left of 12 and would easily roll to the far pocket with the gentlest nudge. 12, side pocket, she nearly whispered, sucked one smoking breath deeply, and aimed precisely. Black, corner pocket. She wondered how long goodbye would take.

# Black, Corner Pocket

Treasure Ingles-Thompson

Isn't this the way they'd always been, playing this insipid game of cat and mouse? His wanting her when the time wasn't right, and her wanting him when others would have long before told him to go take a hike. But never were they in synch with each other's needs and desires, proving that together is not what they were meant to be.

She saw him in a new light now, even as he leaned, left foot back and right leg squat thrust forward, across the pool table. There was the light cast by the swag lamp stretched from the room corner opposite him to hang directly over the table. That effect was stunning; his pale skin shone nearly gold as he focused all his energy onto tapping the yellow ball into the side pocket. There was the light that seemed to burn from within him, shining outward, the glow she'd call it if she described it later. A beacon. An announcement of spiritual proportions.

He may have called it the hunger. When he had heard that she was in town and hoped to see him, he had been at least a little hungry for her. He thought of a night when they were teens when he had lifted her up onto a table of about this height and done what he'd only seen in movies. At first, he had planned to experiment a little, move her this way and that, and fake what was necessary. More the social academic than the graceful lady's man, he had planned for a learning experience, but then he had lost himself to the situation the way many others in the same position may have. What they had learned had amounted to something akin to primal magic. Lately, his hunger had been less easy to explain but slightly easier to pin down. A quick fix procured on dark country roads, where fragrances would dissipate into the night and the chemicals that caused them would course

Untitled
Stuart Norman

Beneath this sullen crescent moon,
the stars blacked out
by the man-made landscape;
Five amber-hue globes
crest the cast-iron tree-trunk
that digs its copper-plated roots
into the dead Earth;
they burn brightly across God's black sky.

Spirituality wrought, rotting
recast in plain speak broken narratives
that turn in the breeze;
a tyburn jig.

Nature yields itself to sin
and minutes later, he is within;
She holds her breath
stoically, patiently dying, dead.
Bloated necrophile, you are repulsive:
she spins in the hope
that you might fall off.

Broken bits of moonlight
Fractured from the pulpits and platforms
of hoary-haired children
beaming with infantile smiles
that stretch from ear to ear,
coast to coast, with gritted teeth.

The ocean, the universe, the universal
that spreads between our islands of idiocy:
It rolls and churns
that which can only be sex;
it move to every shore
where the black-smoke oil rigs,
man, machine, and the man-made Father
only force it back to God knows where.

his face, as if the words themselves tasted badly). As a former medical student, the escaped patient had somehow found his way to the Richard Smalley's dental office, almost a twenty mile hike on foot. (At this point in the explanation, the fat sheriff had quieted his tone, as if telling a ghost story over a campfire.)

"After you were taken in to receive medical treatment, some local cops went to seal off the scene back at that office. At that point, nobody really knew what had happened." He paused, as if for dramatic effect. "Well, they did a little looking around before too long, which is normal procedure. That's when they found the bodies."

Louis went cold all over again. "The bodies?" he whispered the question, remembering the spreading blood from behind the closet door.

"Yeah," the sheriff replied. "Richard Smalley and four women. Receptionists. He killed them all and...stuffed them in that closet. Must have just placed the last one in there when you arrived."

Louis stared at the cop's fat face, soaking it all in. He leaned back against his pillow. The coldness spread throughout his entire body into regions he didn't know existed.

"I think that's enough," he heard his wife say. "I don't think he needs to hear anymore."

Feeling faint at the news, at learning of the situation he had walked into with pure ignorance, Louis suddenly wished the sheriff away.

Thankfully, he heard the sheriff rise to his feet, his chair creaking as he stood. "I'll be in touch, Mr. Baker." The sheriff clapped him on the shoulder. "You just take it easy and rest now. Everything is gonna be fine." He paused again. "You were one lucky man."

Without turning to look at the sheriff, Louis nodded, having not known until then what had become of the *real* dentist and his aides. The fat man said, "Good day, Mrs. Baker." Then he was gone.

Louis, feeling tired and worn out already that day, looked up warmly at his wife. He held out his hand and she took it. He softly spoke, "I think I'm gonna take a nap."

"Okay, dear," she told him. Then: "I'm so sorry this happened to you, Lou. I'm so sorry."

He nodded.

She went on speaking, though her words were becoming fuzzy along with everything else. "You're gonna be okay. We'll have you out of here in no time."

Louis nodded again. He felt himself floating away, his eyelids going heavy.

"When I get you home, you'll be just as good as new. And we'll put this behind us. We'll even star living healthier, for your heart..."

She kept speaking, though her voice came from far away.

And just as was drifting into a slumber, she said one last thing that at first was not quite understandable to him.

Just as he nodded off, however, her words chased him down into the tide of deep sleep and became clear.

"We'll get that cavity fixed."

legs were broken, and then in the next instant his body was propelled up over the hood until his face smashed into the van's windshield. Louis blinked. In the very next instant the dentist was flying through the air, nearly sailing twenty feet down the road before crashing down onto the cement. There were several more cracking sounds as the dentist's body was broken further before he crumbled into a lifeless heap.

The minivan's brakes screeched through the air. Louis was aware of the high-pitched wail they made. Then the pain in his chest deepened, and everything went black.

He finally came to the very next day. The first thing he noticed was the pure, egg-white color of the walls and ceiling. His first thought-*Oh God, I'm back at the dental office!*- nearly caused him to jerk in alarm. Then his wife's pretty face was visible above him, looking down at him in much the same way Dr. Smiley had done.

"Oh honey," he heard his wife speak, her voice sounding distant. "Oh sweetie, you're gonna be okay."

Louis looked at her questioningly, trying to speak. No words would come. He felt drowsy, weak.

"Don't try to talk, Lou. You need to save your strength."

Louis looked at her questioningly still, unsure as to where he was or what exactly had happened to him.

In answer to his thoughts, his wife said, "You had a heart attack. Doctor's say it was a mild one and that you were lucky." His wife wiped at her eyes, where tears were starting to form. Louis could see tracks down her cheeks, trails of former tears.

"I can't blame you, nobody can. Not after what you went through with that… that man."

Louis tried to speak again, to ask about the crazed man.

Perhaps sensing what he was feeling, his wife said, "Don't worry, Lou. He's in a coma and they don't expect him to come out of it anytime soon. He can't hurt you. Not anymore."

It was a week before he could go home. His days were filled with treatments and tube feeding, his nights accompanied by nightmares of the ordeal. He felt his strength return little by little as each day passed, and he was thankful to still be alive. Halfway through the week, he even regained the ability to speak, though hardly above a whisper.

That very same day, Louis received the first guest besides his wife and the endless stream of doctors and nurses. It was a man who identified himself as a member of the Sheriff's department. Short, pudgy, sporting a crimson colored nose, and decked out in a customary black uniform, the sheriff explained to him exactly what had happened, every little detail.

The man calling himself Dr. Smiley was actually named Quentin Woods. The day before Louis' encounter with the madman, Mr. Woods had successfully escaped a hospital that specialized in "Mental Rehabilitation" (the fat sheriff had said the words with a grimy look on

*"We're not finished yet!"* he heard the dentist scream, his breath laboring as he yelled the words.

Louis, who was not in good shape and knew it, pumped his arms for speed. The hallway appeared to be endless. From both sides, the oil paintings on the walls blurred past his vision. As he rounded the final corner, he heard the dentist shriek once again, *"We...are...not...finished...yet!"*

Louis tried to block the voice out as he made his way to the front door of the office. His shaking fingers struggled to turn the knob, but it kept sliding through his sweaty fingers. He turned to look over his shoulder and watched as the dentist advanced upon him. The other man's eyes were frantic, nearly hungry looking. He screamed, *"OUR BUSINESS IS NOT COMPLETED, DO YOU HEAR ME!? WE HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS!"*

Louis barely screamed before he finally caught a firm grasp on the door knob. He quickly turned it, spraining his wrist as he did so but not paying it any mind. There was another stabbing pain in his chest as he flung himself through the doorway.

Bright sunshine met him as he hurriedly sprinted across a sidewalk towards the nearby parking lot. He turned one last time to see the dentist as he followed him, noticing that Dr. Smiley had yet neglected to remove the scalpel from his own chest. It dangled and wobbled from the wound as the dentist raced to catch up with him. There was another scalpel in the dentist's right hand.

Louis turned to look forward again, pumping his arms faster, darting across the surface of the parking lot and passing his car as he mad his way towards the street beyond it.

*Oh God, this guy is catching up to me.*

He could hear the dentist's footsteps as he decreased the distance between the two of them, sure that at any moment he would feel the scalpel tear into his ribcage.

"Help me!" Louis screamed for anyone who may have been listening as he bounded onto the street. To his dismay, his boiling brain told him that nobody was in the immediate area.

From behind, the dentist (who was steadily closing in on him) screamed again, *"Let me back into your mouth! Let me at that fucking tooth! Let me at that mother fucker!"*

Then there was another pain in Louis' chest, and he nearly crumpled to the ground as he reached the far sidewalk. His knees suddenly went weak and the world seemed to lose color. Stumbling over his own feet like a drunk, he put two hands out to break his fall. He then crawled breathlessly along the sidewalk, knowing that death was right behind him. Turning, he watched as the dentist made his way closer, making stabbing gestures at him with the scalpel.

The dentist blurted, *"This won't hurt a bit!"*

Louis, who could not gain his feet, shrank away from the crazed man just as a silver minivan seemed to materialize out of nowhere. The dentist froze in his tracks, putting up his free hand palm out as if to say *stop!* as the large vehicle bore down on him. Louis flinched away as the minivan collided with the other man. There was a jagged shattering sound as Dr. Smiley's

"Everything okay?" The question was asked courteously enough. But when Louis turned his attention back to the dentist, the man was holding a sharp scalpel in his other hand.

"Everything okay?"

Louis gulped down, fought for the words. His legs started to shake. The goose bumps had returned in earnest. He thought he could hear the *thump, thump, thump* of his heart as it thudded behind his breastbone. His fingernails bit into the chair harder than ever.

*Whose blood is that? Who could be lying beyond that door?*

Finally, he found the ability to speak.

"I'm fine," he managed to choke the words.

The dentist (if that was really what he was, he had no clue) smiled, wiped his forehead, and said, "Well, good, that's *good* Mr. Baker. We wouldn't want you to be doing *badly*, now *would* we Mr. Baker?"

Louis shook his head in agreement. "I su-suppose not," was his reply.

"Let's get you some more of that numbing agent," Dr. Smiley generously proclaimed. He bent back toward his tray of instruments, and Louis graciously watched as he set the scalpel down.

His eyes moved back over to the closet door, and near the bottom the pool of blood had only gotten larger, staining the white tiled floor crimson.

Louis tried to get a hold of him self, then felt a short pain in his chest, but he ignored it. The dentist had turned his back to him. Louis watched him prepare the needle filled with Novocain, and almost as if he were not in control of his body, he saw himself rising out of his chair, saw his arm reach out, and saw his hand grasp the scalpel previously held by the dentist. Then the dentist was turning, startled, dropping the needle to the floor. Louis nearly leapt from his chair, survival instincts coming to life inside him, and he saw his arm dart forward, saw the scalpel plunge into the other man's chest. The dentist's red eyes became huge like saucers as he fell back against the far wall, knocking his tray down and causing the assortment of instruments to scatter all over the floor. The dentist screamed in shocked pain, his hand going to the scalpel that was lodged into the right side of his breastbone.

Louis backed away slowly, not at first comprehending what he had done, frozen. The dentist stared at him in manic hatred, the blood-shot eyes burning a hole through him in their heated stare.

The dentist had bitten down in pain, biting through his bottom lip in the process. A thin stream of blood ran down his chin, but he paid it no attention. A lot more blood was pouring out of the wound in his chest, staining the neat white uniform. Without removing the scalpel, the dentist pointed one shaky finger at him and shouted, "This is intolerable!"

With that, the world swam back into focus and Louis turned on his heels and dashed toward the doorway. The dentist uttered a surprised shriek. Louis pelted through the open door, nearly running smack into the wall before hastily turning to run down the hallway. As he did, he could hear the steps of the dentist behind him, pursuing him.

The Dentist continue from pg. 82

The words repeatedly echoed inside Louis' head.

*I don't know who this guy is or what his fucking problem may be, but he was telling the truth. He* isn't *a dentist.*

More than ever, Louis was wishing he had never eaten that hard-shell taco the month before, or eaten that mint chocolate-chip ice cream after that, or even told his wife about the pain in his tooth. More than ever before, Louis wanted to be far, far away from this odd man in the white coat, this man who lied about his name and made cruel jokes.

*But it wasn't a joke!*

With each passing moment, Louis was coming to believe that he had come to the wrong place at the wrong time. He could feel the dentist's hot breath from above, as if his work required a great amount of exertion. He was revolted by the other man's grim and tense determination, as if the cavity he were working to repair had offended him personally. But most of all, it was that series of words that came back to haunt him: *I'm not a real dentist.*

Just then there was a sharp pain in the bottom-right part of his mouth, as the Novocain was starting to wear off. Louis involuntarily jerked with the force of the shock. The dentist cut off the drill at once, appearing apologetic…but also looking vexed at the interruption.

"Numbing agent starting to wear off?" Dr. Smiley (Smalley) asked as pleasantly as he could. To Louis, he no longer looked composed at all, but resembled a man who was on the edge of exploding. On the other hand, Louis had had enough of the bizarreness. He opened his mouth to say so, then shut it immediately, bringing one hand up to rub the area where the dentist had been working.

*Oh…my…God.*

He continued to rub his mouth, not responding to the dentist's latest question. Using two fingers, he probed along the surface of the tooth, which was located directly below the tooth with the cavity.

Amazed beyond recognition, Louis thought, *Oh my dear God, the man has been drilling the wrong tooth, and I didn't even notice! This crazy son of a bitch has been drilling away at a tooth that was nowhere near the one I pointed out to him!*

The dentist had been drilling along the bottom right side of his mouth, while the cavity was located directly above on the same side. Louis hadn't noticed because that whole side of his mouth had been numbed.

"Numbing agent starting to wear off?" The dentist asked again, a little impatiently.

Louis glanced at the man as if he were a side-show attraction. His eyes narrowed to near slits, his phobias giving way to white hot rage. His mouth opened to let loose a spur of vulgarities.

Then Louis eyed the closed. For the first time, he noticed something new. A pool of blood had spread out from under the closet door.

Louis's jaw nearly hit the floor. He was unable to believe the sight, much as he was unable to believe many of the things that had happened since he had first spoken to Dr. Smiley in what had to have been an eternity ago.

didn't care and told her to "drink her fucking gin." She didn't remember much else from that night. At some point, the flamingos on Frank's shirt seemed to be moving, and she remembered someone biting one of her nipples, but not much more.

The sirens were a little louder now, and she could see a pair of patrol cars at the end of the street, their lights flashing like Independence Day sparklers amid the raindrops. Jason had taken her out for Independence Day a few weeks ago to one of those community fireworks shows. He'd made her wear this ugly red, white, and blue miniskirt and these tall stiletto heels, told her she needed to be more damned patriotic. She thought she looked like a hooker, and he told her whores were good for military morale. He grinned when he said that, and she wondered what he meant, but she didn't argue. There wasn't much point in arguing with Jason. He always won, and he liked to let her know that he'd won. He hadn't even stayed next to her during the fireworks show: he slipped away and she saw him flirting with another woman at one point. She'd asked him about it that night as they lay in bed, but he'd just pushed her head down to his crotch and told her to do what she was made for.

The two police cars pulled to a stop across the street, and four officers stepped out and glanced around. She recognized Officers Bailey and Hendricks; they came into the restaurant often for coffee. Bailey looked up at her, and she smiled and waved, but he just frowned, pulled his cap down, and the four walked towards her building. She puffed her cigarette, smiled to herself again, then flicked the butt away into the rain. Officer Bailey was a nice guy, one of the younger members of the force, about a year or two older than her. She'd flirted with him a few times when he came into the restaurant: he got flustered easily, and she thought it was cute when he blushed. That was the time Jason had hit her; he'd seen her one day flirting with Bailey, and slapped her that night and told her if he caught her trying to "whore herself out" to other men again, he'd leave her. He had asked her if she felt guilty for betraying him, and she had said she did.

She stepped away from the window and into the bedroom, slipped out of her white and red robe. It was damp, and squelched slightly when it fell to the tile. She pulled on a skirt, some heels, and a blouse, and walked into the kitchen and poured herself a martini. There was a knock on the door.

"Lisa? Open the door." That was Bailey. She smiled, sat down in one of the chairs, crossed her legs and sipped her drink. "It's unlocked," she replied. She smiled at the men when the door opened and they stepped in, guns drawn. "There's no need for those. Watch your step though...it's a bit slippery in here." She watched their eyes follow a pool of blood on the kitchen floor. One edge of the pool smeared away into the living room, and one of the officers stepped in to investigate. Bailey just shook his head, stepped carefully around the pool and stopped in front of her.
"You're covered in blood," he said.
"He's worse," she replied with a grin.
"What happened?"
"I killed him."
"You mean he attacked you, and you fought back in self-defense?"
She smiled and touched his cheek, leaving a little smudge of red. "You're sweet. I borrowed a crowbar from Mr. Liston next door. It's on the counter. There's some money next to it to buy him a new one."
Bailey sighed. "I've got to arrest you."
She licked her lips, and tasted copper. She smiled, then laughed a bit. "He always did say I was sexy with blood on my lips."

Her eyes drifted again, this time to the window of Amy Selleck. Amy was a mousy, run-down girl of twenty-five, a mother of two little girls. She and her girls were hiding from Amy's husband after Amy caught him doing "naughty things" to the girls. He'd beat her nearly to death when she'd taken them to her mother's house; her left eye still sat funny from where his boot had cracked the bones in her cheek and forehead. Jason had never beat Lisa; he'd slapped her once, but she'd deserved it, and he'd said she looked sexy with blood on her lips. He held her down when they had sex that night, and told her that she liked it, and she told him that she did.

Her gaze dropped back down to the street, where Mr. Jackson, the postman, was making his rounds. Mr. Jackson was a nice-faced black man, married, with a son and dog. She'd often seen them all together at the park for Sunday picnics, Mr. Jackson and his son throwing a Frisbee with the dog yapping at their heels, while Mrs. Jackson sat on a blanket reading a book. She'd also seen Mr. Jackson come into the restaurant where she worked, his mistress hanging off his arm. Funny what you learn about people sometimes. Jason had cheated on her once or twice, but he'd told her it was just sex and that made it okay. Lisa'd told him that she didn't like the way he treated her, but he'd just laughed and called her a slut again and pressed his cigarette against her breast. She'd yelped and tried to get up, but he'd grabbed her hips and held her down and told her to stop bitching. She still had a little red scar from it.

Mrs. Crispin had shown up by then, and she watched quietly as the old couple on the second floor of the building across the street started their normal shouting ritual. Jason had never shouted at her; he didn't need to. He'd always had that calm, confident, practically-arrogant swagger about him. He knew nothing was a threat to him, and he had liked to flaunt that. He told her she got off on being powerless to him, that she liked to be dominated, and he'd say it in that matter-of-fact sort of tone that made her believe it. She'd tell him as much, because he liked to hear it.

She lit another cigarette, and let the remnants of the old one fall from her fingertips; the wind caught it and carried it a bit, then the sky opened up and it began to rain; the children below her scurried to collect the kickball and seek shelter, and Mr. Jackson opened his umbrella. The rain felt good on her face. Somewhere in the distance, she could hear the slow whine of sirens.

She'd met Jason at a party, or rather, afterwards. That is, she woke up the next morning naked and he next to her, and it just sort of went from there. He'd never exactly asked her out on a date. They exchanged names and phone numbers and promised to call each other, went about their separate ways, and that was that. About a week later, he came into the restaurant with a skinny girl with big boobs and a short skirt. He ordered a steak, the girl ordered a salad, and by the end of the meal, he'd talked her into giving him her address and inviting him over for drinks that night, then he got up and left the skinny girl with the bill.

That night, Jason had shown up at her door an hour later than they'd agreed upon and he brought a friend of his, a greasy-haired man named Frank, who Jason said was in pharmaceutical sales. Frank wore a wild pink Hawaiian shirt printed with flamingos. Jason poured them some gin, and she told him she didn't like the way Frank was looking at her, but he told her he

## The Taste of Copper

Adam Gabriel Kamerer

Lisa leaned out the window of her apartment and took a slow drag on her cigarette: Virginia Slims, like her mother used to smoke. A soft breeze rustled her damp, once-blonde hair, now crimson. She quietly let her gaze drift along the scenery; a few children played a game of kickball in the street three stories below, their laughter the tinkling of little bells carried on the cool pre-storm wind. Angry clouds hung low in the sky, but it had not yet begun to rain. The coolness was a welcome reprieve from the oppressive midsummer heat.

She took another drag on her cigarette and let her eyes wander along the face of the apartment complex across the street, its glass eyes portals into the lives of her neighbors. Mr. Crispin on the second floor sat on his balcony, tobacco smoke curling around his head from the pipe clutched in his toothless, wrinkled grin. He read the paper, as always, and didn't answer when she called out a greeting to him, as always. She suspected that was because he was deaf, just like his wife.

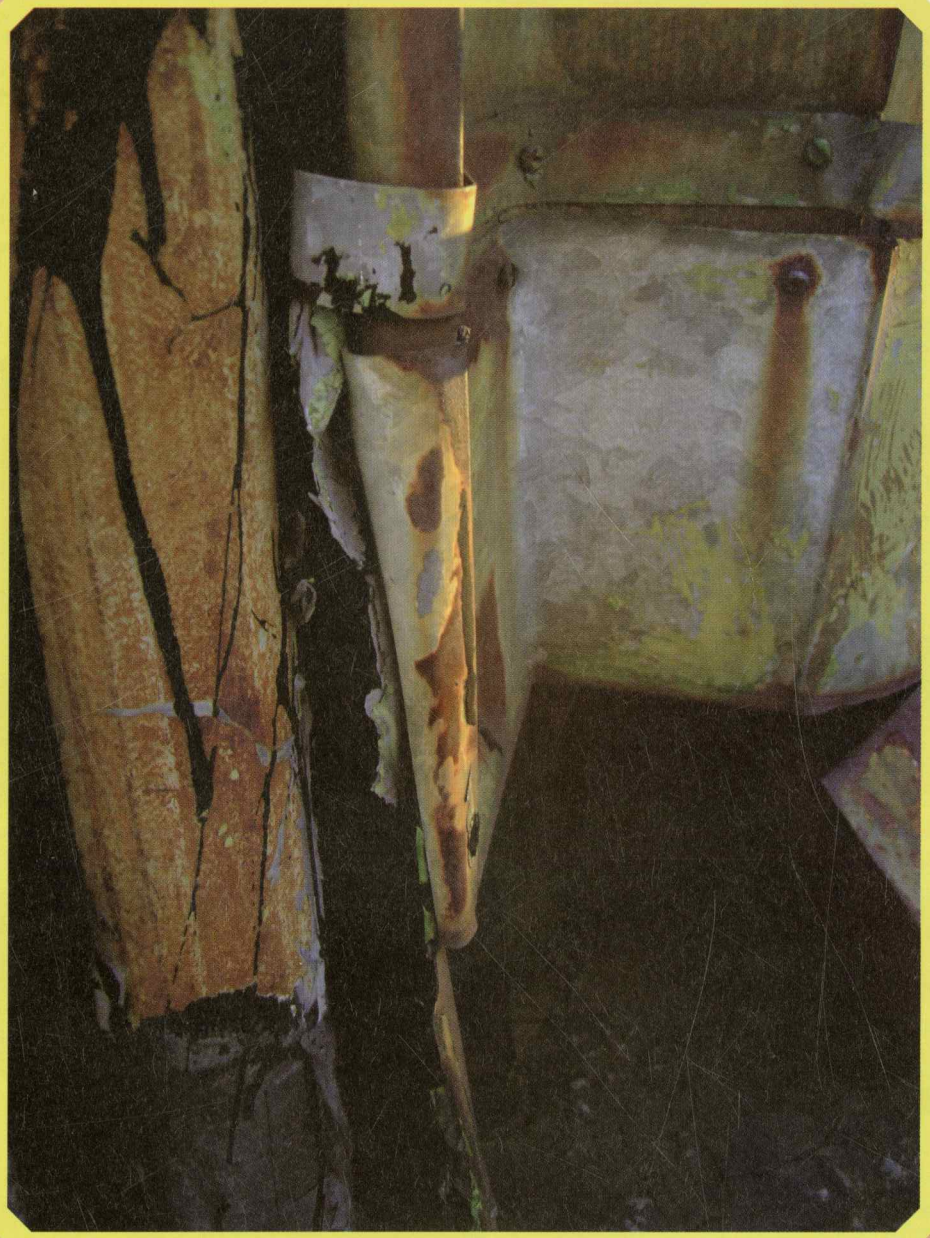
Lisa glanced at her watch, absently rubbed away a smudge of something from its glass face; it was a quarter to four. Soon, Mrs. Crispin would come back from the insurance company where she had worked since 1953 and the two would shout back and forth, asking about each other's days and eventually debating what Mrs. Crispin would cook for dinner. Mr. Crispin would argue that they should just go out to eat, because, as he could be heard to say far too loudly, her cooking always "tasted like shit." Jason had never liked Lisa's cooking either, but then, the things he had liked about her were highly selective.

Inevitably, Mrs. Crispin would squash the argument and the two would silently scowl at each other over the dinner table. Then they would sit in their recliners and watch loud television until Mrs. Crispin went to bed.

She let her eyes wander away from the old man. Mrs. Haverdy on the third floor was speaking energetically at a telephone, nervously glancing now and again across the street at her. Lisa puffed her cigarette again, smiled, and waved slightly at the woman. Mrs. Haverdy was one of those nosy, middle-aged women who didn't work, and spent her days trying to catch her neighbors committing various unsavory and un-Christian acts. Jason had liked to give the woman a show; he liked to throw open the curtains and press her bare skin up against the window when he knew Mrs. Haverdy was watching. It embarrassed Lisa to be so exposed to the world, but that had never mattered to Jason. He would just laugh, call her a slut, and tell her to spread her legs wider. She'd do it too, because it pleased him.

Editor's Choice

Fishnet Legs in Yellow
Lee Beaver



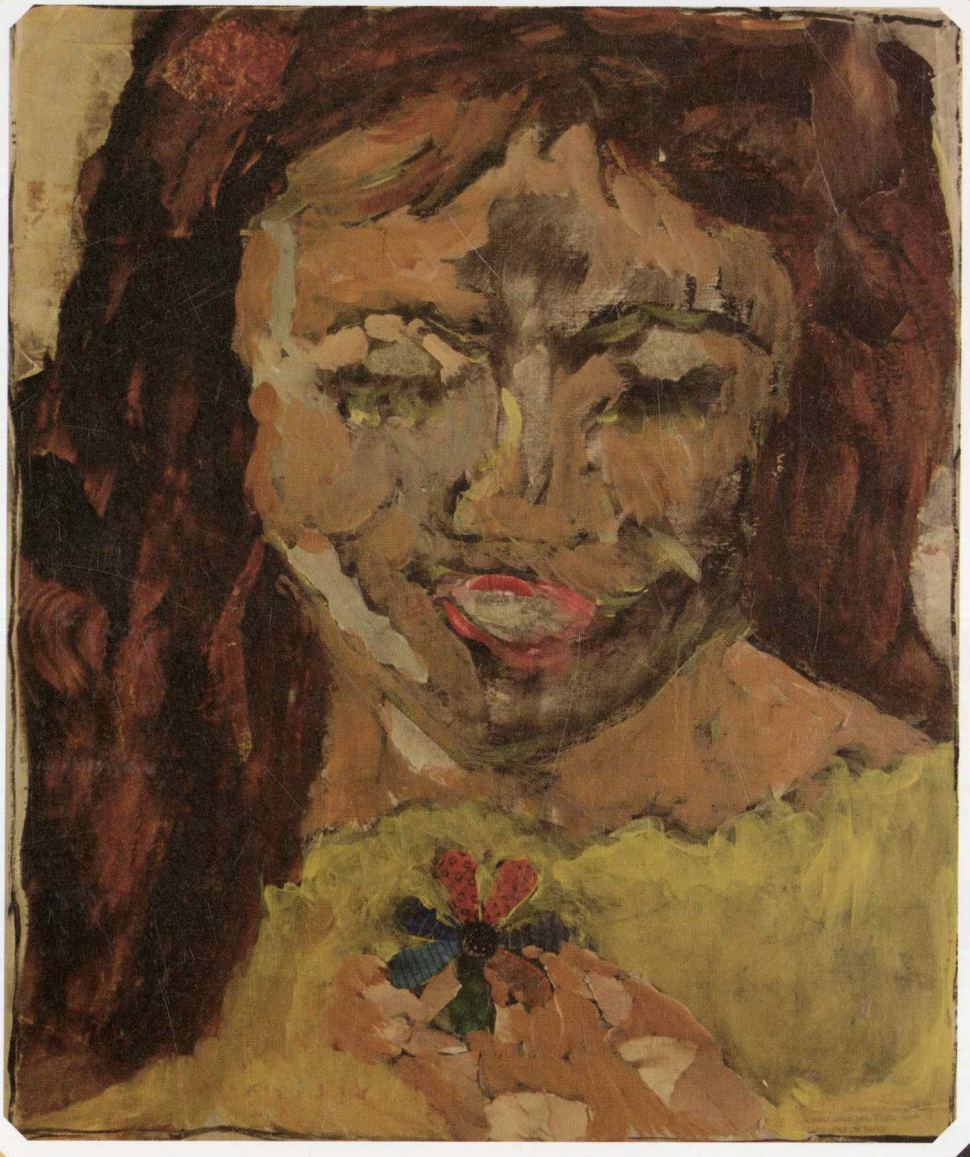
Cut and Paste
Jimbo Smith

## Revision

Abbey K. Davis

In drawing class I learned
the anatomy of the human form
but you spoke with your lips pressed against mine
so I felt your words all the way down my spine
and their meaning lingered in my bones
washed out in my blue veins
and shining all over my pale, moonlit face.
Well, my art teacher says
anyone with eight hundred dollars
can take a good picture
and that's why photographers aren't artists.
But vintage tinged Polaroids, heavy lined eyes,
and too thin girls looking empty
are only good for art galleries,
shiny printed books bound in leather,
and postcards mailed to someone else with an art degree.
I think it's human to wonder
if Van Gogh knew he would be famous
or if his art was seemingly for nothing.

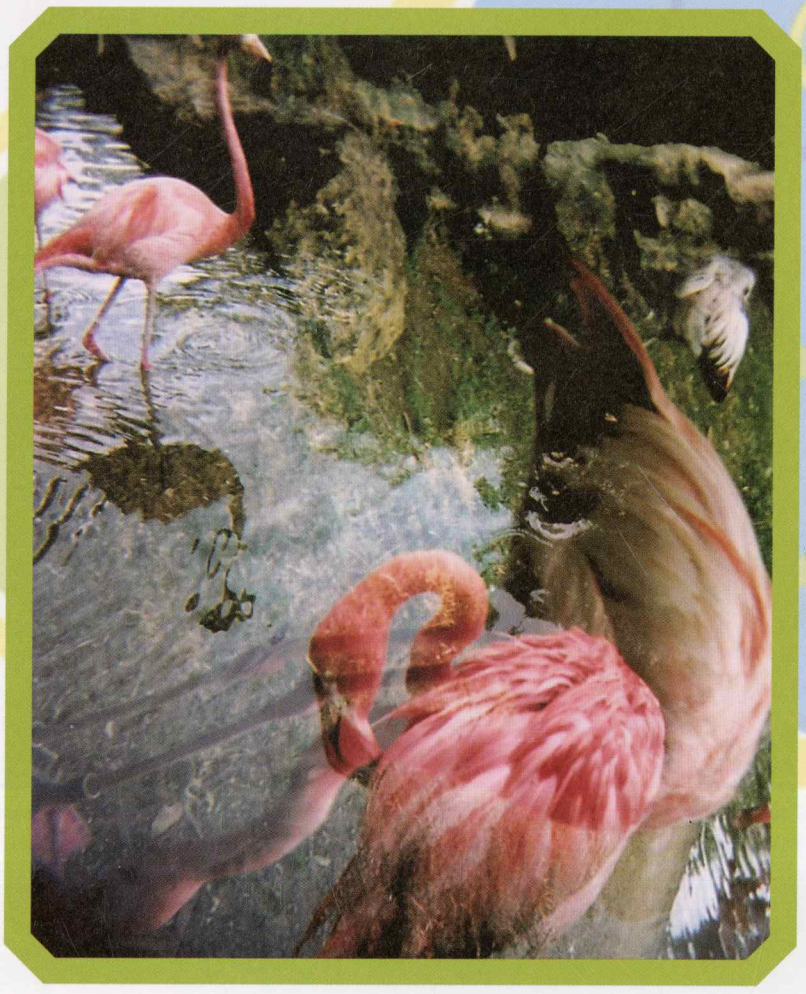
**Wildflower 2**
**Robby Ammoett**



The Things Her Mother Left Her

Treasure Ingles-Thompson

My little girl days were spent under trees--
The pecan tree at the back of mommy's office
Big elms and oaks looming high, like variegated clouds
Above the front lawn on the side street in front of my school,
The willow tree that bent to flow like tears,
Weeping, they said, around me, sequestered me,
And that was my backyard or the gateway to something greater.
And my friends were books and dolls, books to read and dolls to listen.
And when I read aloud, I heard the whispers of my grandmother,
Whose lips, sick and cracked as she talked to my mother in the other room, bled--
This only of memory recent, the year before, when she had died finally,
Achingly, in the summer home that she had earned for her retirement,
The place on the lake, the place that killed her with its toxins
Spilled by workers up the way, the corporation pulping wood
To make our books, our pages for our letters, those that she would write
To say goodbye, last words, her testament and her gift, bequeathed
But pushed away now by my mother, locked up in boxes in the cherry chifferobe
In the hall, memories too painful to mention of having her, her own mother,
All her life, and then--suddenly it must have seemed--not at all,
Except in letters penned in her own hand, first flowing, lovely Palmer method,
Then scrawling, sharp turns, hesitations showing pain in every stroke,
Locked aside for progeny, for days under willow trees, her audience subdued.



Flamingos
Kristen Bromer

Treading Water

Cory Lockhart

Lies pour like raindrops from a hurricane,
Inundating dry, unsaturated ground,
Breeching levies I have constructed
To combat torrential deception.

*Paid rent, didn't drink,*
*We won the War!*
But we didn't think
Lies would carry on this far.

I only wish I had an umbrella,
Even though I know it won't stop the rain.
Can't even remember the last time
I saw the Sun shine; it has been eclipsed
And oh, how I miss its radiance so.

Wading through shallow pools of age, health,
Beauty; treading through fidelity and
Financial soundness—
Buckets won't save our boat.

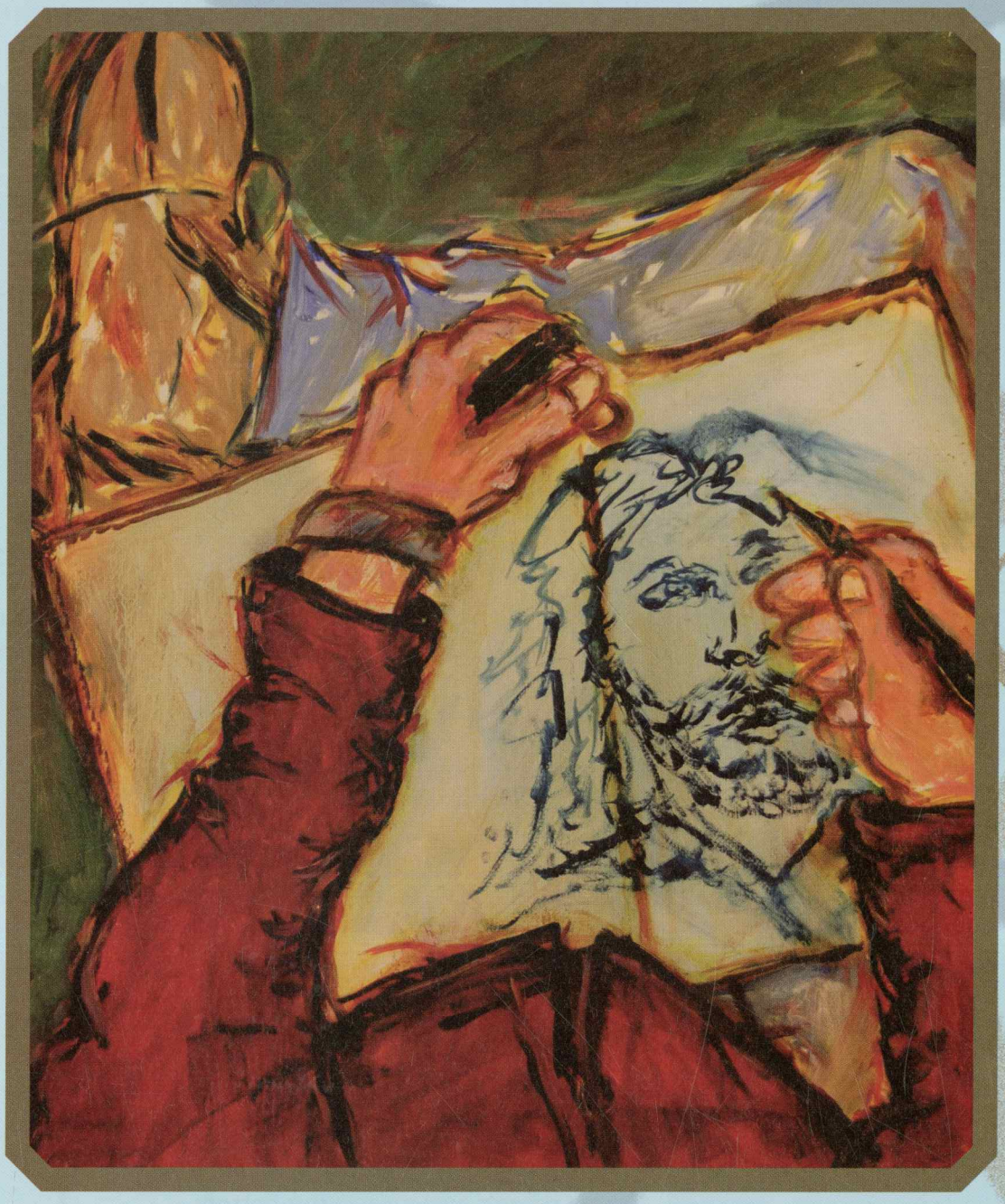
I dive now just to find what was lost
Long before the flood ever washed my
Faith in humanity away.

*How did this stone get chained to my leg?*

Maybe there's treasure at the bottom,
But if we're lucky, it's fool's gold
And we will all drown.

Or maybe a prophet will come along
And part this bloody Sea of Lies for us.

I hope Jesus brought his water wings—
Staying afloat is difficult enough
Without hypocrites pulling you down.



Art is All Self-Portrait
Robby Ammonett

## Leaf in Wind

Amanda Hosey

green blade twisting, turning

between my fingers

like the hair of my lover
green like the lime

in our water

sing your song of wings

as the wind blows

your body
writhes and shakes as he,

strong wind, caresses you

like you were his
lover
smooth skin, sweet smell

ripped away from me

by him

pushed to the ground

left

for dogs to leave their marks

bare and naked with no one

not even me

in this place you chose
my green blade—beautiful as ever

though shredded by this world

broken and alone I will leave you

More than Words
Corinna Brewer

Editor's Choice

## Boogie Man

Matt Roth

Hello, I don't believe we've meant. Or
did you slip into my bedroom, all decorated
with robots and cartoon rocket ships,
after I had just watched Wrath of Khan with my
parents –
predivorce – to dangle brain-munching scorpions
over my sideways head in bed. I slept with
cotton balls scotch-taped in my ears that night.
Does it really matter if, with an unrelenting eye, you
reduce this note to dust and find it in several unrelated
lines? A spinning nickel loses its random dynamism
and
lands, eventually, heads or tails.
But who really calls it? I don't want
to hear them fight anymore. Just decide
who will take the television and budget for
legal fees. One can always argue over books
once the ruling is in and visitation is settled.
Have a seat Boogie man, try me,
I'm perfectly fine with the room spinning.
Just don't read too closely
right around here, please.

Boogie, why do you have a French accent?
So as to suggest that you have the luxury
of time enough to ponder how
"family" is only family because it is not "duck,"
not "mauve," not "hammer," not "whole?"
What makes you think I ever called "heads"
I don't recall calling "not tails." I just like
that brief and poignant ringing with the end-
stopped thwap in your palm. Please feel free
to decide what I didn't mean, brain scorpion.
Enjamb it up your nose Boogieman, I don't care.
No amount of ear tickling is going to make
me accustomed to the feeling of something
wriggling so close to the holes in my head.
That doesn't mean she doesn't love me enough
to try with rolled up tissues, pine needles, fingers.
Before my parents Xerox this and mail it to each
Other in notarized letters I will have to heed the
French voice in my head saying, step here into
the mystifying chamber son,
your meanings are showing.

# 2008 Cover Art

## A Cheshire Prospect
Jessica Young

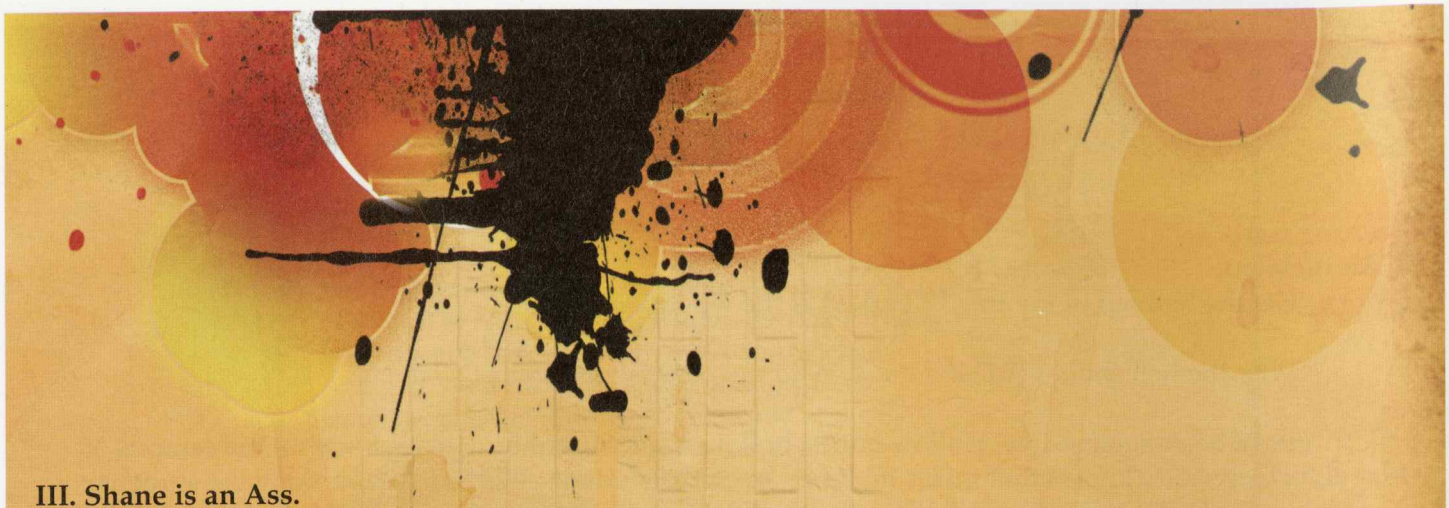
## Ink

Adam Kamerer

It's not about the words, but the ink,
Blue and black in vibrant splotches,
Like bruises beneath skin that
Has been victimized by hammering fists.
I want to plunge my arms into inkwells,
Through glass into pools of lightstealing
black,
And pour it over my body until I am
Fused with the stains of my skin
And only my eyes peer out.
I want to tilt my head towards heaven,
Pen upturned, and binge myself
Til my tongue and teeth are inundated,
Saturated, obsessed as I am with ink.
I want to fill my belly,
Bloat and grow to bursting,
Paint the world with myself
Until only my ink remains,
And I can steal the sun for myself.

Looking Retroactively (Human Nature)
Caroline Ward

# Editor's Choice



**III. Shane is an Ass.**

Shane is the paragon of jock assholes. He thinks it's a funny joke to torment the big squirrel; he's the only student on campus that gives me grief. I wish I had an acorn big enough for Shane—he would definitely serve society better if he were on the giving end of the *Swift's Proposal* scenario. All I can do is throw acorns at him.

**IV. The Convenience of Squirrel Illiteracy.**

I don't think the woodpecker was dead until he hit the ground. Maybe not even then. He was at least stunned on impact. The acorn couldn't have killed him. Maybe it did. All I know is that he's dead now. Dead or stunned—a dog came by and scooped him up off the ground and into its jaws five minutes later. I wondered if God minds animals murdering other animals.

*******

GENESIS 9 (NIV)

1 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. 2 The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. 3 Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

4 "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal…

*******

I guess that means that if anyone ever heed's Swift's proposal, we should cook the children before we eat them, so as not to offend God. And besides, doesn't God know that squirrels can't read. So if I were to kill Shane, when I go before the throne of judgment (which I don't believe in anyway), I'll tell God that I didn't know any better, because squirrels are illiterate.

I'm going to kill Shane, and I'm going to get away with it. I'm immune to the laws of God, because squirrels can't possibly fathom such laws—they must not apply to us. I'm immune to the laws of Man, because, honestly, do you think the police are going to go looking for a squirrel in conjunction with Shane's death? I doubt it. We animals can get away with murder. It's a good feeling.

## Proposal of a Modest Crime

**john lake moss**

**I. An incident.**

"Get the hell out of my tree," I barked at the woodpecker.

"Why the hell should I? D-*d-d-d-d-d*. Who says this is your tree? *D-d-d-d*."

Fits of beak-against-tree. Hollow bones, hollow head. Stupid bird; everybody on the campus of Magnolia University knows that this is my tree—even the students. I am a legend among the students: *The Mutant Squirrel?! Holy crap! He's the size of a small dog. I saw him wearing a football helmet the other day.* Exaggerations, of course. But I *am* big enough to kick a woodpecker's ass, if ever I could catch him. But I didn't necessarily need to catch him. This woodpecker's hubris was a collage of rude disregard, blind pride and mental deficiency—a weighty combination. Hell, the disregard part of the equation was virtually a battleship anchor—the woodpecker may as well have been glued to the tree.

Springtime. Open classroom windows. Limitless access to rubber-bands. A few big, thick rubber bands; one enormous spare acorn: a bird-thumping catapult when applied to the proper fork of a tree branch. Like the one the forks up in a "Y" from the main branch about two feet from the woodpecker's demolition site.

For a third consecutive day, I had suffered a thumpity-thump-thump awakening at the hands (or beak, rather) of this son-of-a-crow. On each of the first two mornings, we had the same conversation, and I just let the matter rest, hoping that Mr. Ass-hat would find another tree at which to hammer IQ points out of his head. The conversation on the third morning was one-sided: *Hey Mister Woodpecker, I think we have a lot in common. I like to eat acorns. I see that you, also, like to eat acorns…*

*…thump…* A well placed acorn to the back of the woodpecker head.

I once saw, through a dorm-room window, a student smash his alarm clock into bits. It's a good feeling. To man, the catharsis of a falling hammer-fist; to me, the catharsis of a projectile acorn. We animals can get away with murder. It's a good feeling.

**II. A Modest Proposal.**

A few days ago, sitting on a tree limb outside a classroom, I heard part of a lecture on Swift's "A Modest Proposal"—the full title of which suggests its ultimate aim: "A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to their Parents, or the Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Publick." I, being but a humble squirrel, find Swift's proposal intriguing. Insofar as I can judge, it is congruent with what I have learned by attending various bits of biology and philosophy classes. I can't ever sit through a whole lecture. I have the attention span of a squirrel. But a squirrel can learn much here at Magnolia University during the spring, when classroom windows generally stay open. Swift's ideas are a beautiful bit of Social Darwinism. The illusion of sanctity of life holds back human society, but I am free of both society and illusion. Every day since the woodpecker incident, I have considered my freedom from these restraints. Swift must have been a squirrel.

Dover and Over and Over Again,
for Matthew Arnold and Anthony Hecht

Matt Roth

Listen, the two of you are pricks alike,
I'm tired of being some place-holding Helen
While you both sum up the nebulous states of the age.
Matt, you're right. In faithful times the place of each
Was firm and fastened down by God's own hand,
And you could from a midnight window muse
Upon the pebbled disarray. But I would hesitate
To long too hard in public for the misplaced
Garter belt of faith, which held the veil high on the leg
Clasped firm against the simple law that pulled it
Downward to the ground. Really now, had you seen
My dress upon the floor? That assertive, cast-off bodice
Was too good not to put in your poem I guess.

And Tony, you should know that even in the sixties
A girl who'd read her classics was never just "pretty."
Also a bottle of head-shop perfume wasn't ever enough
To get in my pants. I doubt if any love was free enough
For you. How goes the booming now my "good-time" giving
Casanova? You're just the total package now aren't you,
With your diminutive slouch and your receding white-boy 'fro?
If I was angry when Matthew pinned the answers to the whole world's
Problems on my petticoat, imagine, please, how I felt phoning my Mother
To explain why you called me "Bitch" in print.

Let's not lose sight, my boys, of the facts:
The French don't give two shits about your chalk-white thighs
Of Dover. They take a car-ride south for their dirty weekends,
If they even go out of the way to deem one as such,
And when they've had their fill of sunlit clashing
They traipse their pebbly voices back to work.

To be alive is like to be a fleck of sand upon the tides,
Cast off in swirling brethren clouds along the surf and left
In foreign corners of the world. If under moonlit cliffs
The wake recedes in rackets, then nap awhile and wake to see
It in again. I won't pretend that nap should be alone
But I don't need some stubbly chin to wax the waning moon poetic.
I see it now and know it will be full again.

No wait. I won't regale you two like that,
Not with my own quaint sum-up pose.
If I'm to leave here with my pride, then I'll be brief.
Like sand your epochs shift beneath your toes,
So hem them up in ladies' clothes,
Or cast them off like lovers.
But when your pens are twitching hot
Don't call me with your troubles.

pleasant tone, "You know, I'm not a real dentist."

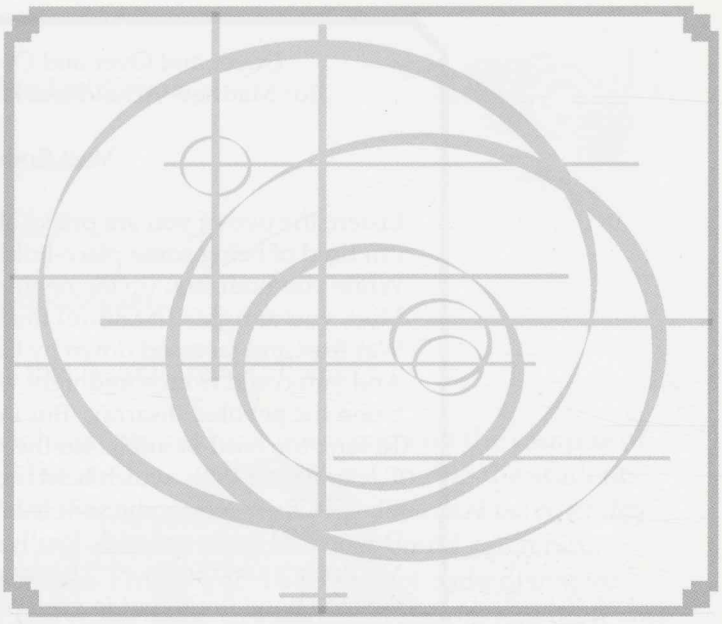
In that first split second, Louis did not at first register the words. Looking into the eyes of the man staring down at him (like a specimen under a microscope) he ran them by his mind once more in what felt like several seconds, but was probably just a mere instant. He then removed his gaze from the dentist, meaning to put on his best grin as if the other man had made a great joke. Surely the dentist was kidding him.

Yet the drill had found its mark and was once again chipping away at his unguarded tooth. Again, Louis was in that frozen state where he felt vulnerable and unable to do much of anything except remain as he was. Again, the dentist, who may or may not have just made a stupid joke that was not so funny, was busy at work invading the sanctity of his mouth.

*I'm not a real dentist? What kind of sick thing is that to say to someone? What kind of thing is that for a* dentist *to say to his own patient?*

His thoughts ran on as the uncomfortable device seemed to dig into the very fabric of his skull. Louis again wondered over the man above him; the sweaty features, the unusually bloodshot eyes, the erratic language and behavior.

Then another thought occurred to Louis.



*Maybe he was telling the truth.*

The thought made him feel cold all over in a way that had nothing to do with the chilly temperature of the room. Goosebumps broke out all along both of his arms. Again, the laboring Dr. Smiley (*Smalley* his mind persisted) did not notice.

*I want out of here.*

The new thought sparked in his mind like a powder keg, erupting into a sense of unreality that was too strong to deny. He told himself that he *had* to either be dreaming or hallucinating. There was just no way this man could have lied to him about his name, calling himself *Smiley* when his name was actually *Smalley.* There was no way this man, who was putting sharp metallic objects into his mouth, could possibly have been serious when he had uttered those ugly words, *You know, I'm not a real dentist.*

*You know, I'm not a real dentist.*

*You know, I'm not a real dentist.*

The Dentist continues on pg. 61

The dentist set both tools aside.

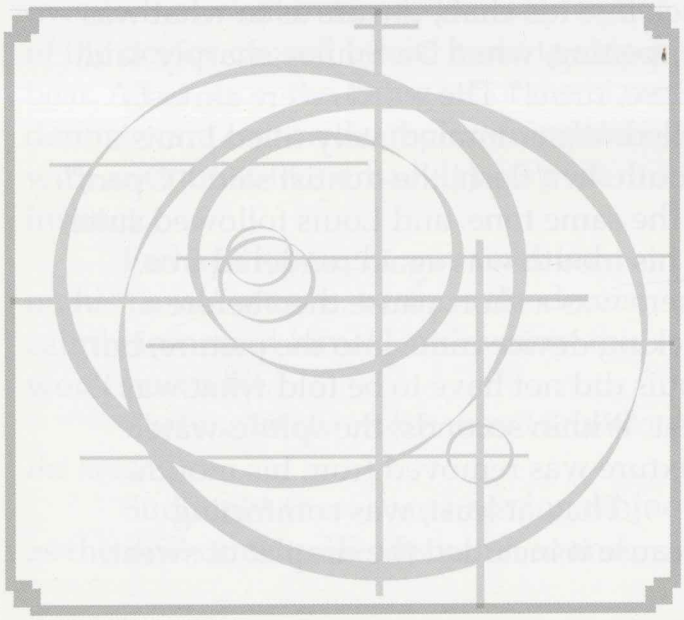
Rising up a bit, Louis seized upon the chance to speak up. "Are you okay Dr. Smi-," the rest of the name would not come. Out of the muggy confusion in his brain (results from his encounter with the dentist thus far) there was a swift illumination as a huge light bulb suddenly lit up in his mind. A memory occurred to Louis. He remembered flipping through the yellow pages to see two names under "Dentistry": Dobbs (who was dead) and Smalley.

*Smalley…not* Smiley.

"Yes, Mr. Baker?"

"What?" Louis uttered nonsensically, meeting gazes with the dentist.

"You were in the middle of asking me a question." His face was drenched in sweat, as if he had just ran a mile in less than seven minutes. He was still breathing hard too.



Louis leaned back in his chair, his eyes narrowing. "Forget it, Dr. It's not important."

"Sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

He had meant to ask the dentist if he was all right, but instead leaned back in his chair to muse over what he had just realized.

*Either I'm out of my mind, or this guy has two names, or I don't know…*

A few seconds passed as he fell victim to his own thoughts. Then the same paralysis from before broke over him. Before he knew it, the drill was once again revving its engine, and the dentist stood poised, ready.

As he again loomed over Louis, the dentist grinned kindly, his head becoming silhouetted as it nearly blocked out the light from above. Louis was unable to grasp exactly how he had found himself back in the same position. The dentist said, "Open, please." Almost without thinking, Louis did so. Though the dentist had done nothing threatening, he had no clue what would result from his doing otherwise. Along with the paralysis and feelings of strangeness it was as if he was at the mercy of this man who, it was becoming increasingly clear, was not well.

The dentist leaned in close to place the drill into his mouth. But just before he did so, the dentist smiled and said almost casually in that same

A second later, Louis felt like screaming as he unbelievingly watched a tiny ball of sweat roll down over the ridge of the dentist's nose, only to unthinkably fall straight into his own mouth. Unable to accept that it had actually happened, or that *any* of it was happening, Louis nearly gagged himself into a vomiting fit at the taste of the fluid as it seemed to simmer on his tongue. He clenched the chair tighter than ever and his eyes went wide.

The dentist seemed not to notice.

*Oh God, is this guy nuts? Is he blind?*

Louis could not overcome the salty taste of the man's sweat. He could actually imagine Dr. Smiley looking down into his mouth as he chipped his tooth away, staring at the moist droplet as it glistened from the fluorescence of the overhead light.

The dentist continued to work in his mouth, though Louis thought he could now *feel* the hand with the drill shaking just the slightest bit. The dentist's eyes were unmistakably red, not merely just bloodshot. He seemed to sweat more and more with every passing second, so much that his cheeks were nearly slick in appearance. To Louis, there was definitely something very wrong with the man. He no longer tried to convince himself otherwise.

What was worse was the fact that this man, who was obviously not well, was essentially performing a type of surgery on him.

*I need to put a stop to this. Either this guy is sick…or crazy.*

Louis attempted to muster up the courage to stop Dr. Smiley, but found that his arm seemed to weigh one hundred pounds. At the same time, aove him, the dentist started to breathe a little harder than before. He wiped yet another bit of sweat from his forehead. Louis inwardly panicked, thinking that another drop of sweat would assail his mouth from above. Thankfully, none did.

But he found that he still felt paralyzed.

*Just raise your hand up, just raise your hand up and tell him-*

His thoughts were cleanly broken off as the drill was shut off and removed from his mouth. He instantly shut it. Feelings of relief flooded into Louis' gut. Above him, the dentist leaned away, straightening.

"How we doing?" he asked.

Louis hesitated for a moment, glad that the drill was away from him. He rubbed his mouth, hoping the Novocain would not wear off anytime soon. Eyeing the room, he sat up in his chair a bit, remarking at how his surroundings seemed to regain focus.

He opened his mouth to respond to the dentist's question when the other man suddenly shoved another device towards his mouth. Louis spasmodically shrank back into his chair, unsure as to what was happening, when Dr. Smiley sharply said, "Here, rinse!" The words were almost yelled. Water immediately filled Louis's mouth. In a flash, the dentist said, "Open," in the same tone, and Louis followed suite as his mouth was again rendered free. There was a short pause then before a sucking device came into the picture, but Louis did not have to be told what was next. Within seconds, the spittle-water mixture was removed from his mouth.

That, at least, was comforting because it included the droplet of sweat.

The dentist still sounded calm, but the look of strain on the man's face had only worsened. It was still as if he were worried about something. The sight only added to Louis' anxiety.

"Yeah, I'm numb doctor."

"Allrighty then," the dentist spoke, "let's get rid of this big bad son of a bitch!"

Louis was suddenly taken aback, both by the dentist's sudden exuberance and his inappropriate use of language. He did not convey these thoughts and feelings, though. Instead, he simply uttered, "Okay."

The dentist returned to his tray filled with torture devices, momentarily reprieving Louis from having to stare into the other man's sweaty face. He was still filled with the same phobias as before, but the fears were intertwined with a new sense that there was something very wrong with this dentist.

*Oh come on, Louis. You're just freaking out...like you* always *do. This guy may have a problem with his bodily fluids, but that's about it. Just sit here and get this bullshit over with.*

Just as the thoughts bounced around inside his mind, the dentist rolled back over to him, drill in hand. The very sight of the device caused Louis' heart to skip a beat. All at once, the thoughts of the bizarre dentist were cast aside, replaced instead with an animal-like dread. It was pure instinct.

Perhaps his fright was revealed on his facial features, because the dentist calmly informed him, "Don't worry, this won't hurt a bit."

*That's what the broken record said about the needle!*

Suddenly, there was a hissing whine as the drill came to life, its harsh sound ringing inside his bones. Just as before, Louis gripped both arms of his chair, nearly punching his nails into through its fabric.

The dentist leaned over him, raising one hand to place the device into his mouth. As he did so, Louis noticed with abrupt alarm that the hand holding the drill was slightly shaky. He attempted to speak up, to do anything that would prevent what he knew was about to occur.

*Oh my God, he's gonna cut my tongue off or something...*

Just as he found the words to put a halt to it all, the drill had found its mark and was quickly grinding away. A moment later, Louis fought to convince himself that he had only imagined it all. He was upset at having to see a dentist, that's all it was.

But then he gazed clearly into the dentist's face. Even as the drill did its nasty work at wearing away the cavity in his tooth, Louis noticed the way the other man's eyes were, without a doubt, completely bloodshot. At that precise moment, the same sense of dread once again swarmed over his heart.

*Jesus...what in the blue fuck is wrong with this guy?*

Louis very much wanted to ask the question, but the drill in his mouth prevented him from doing so. Plus, in his current position, he felt helpless as well as exposed, as if he were a rape victim. He was unable to do much of anything but lay exactly as he was.

The dentist stood above him, staring harshly into his mouth as he meticulously worked. The minutes went by until when, with one free hand, he again wiped at his forehead, oblivious that the glove came away wet and shiny.

found himself giving in. Slowly, like the uncovering of a tomb, he slid his mouth open. The dentist reached in (*ohdearohdearohdear!*) and there was the dreadful prick of the needle, sharp at first, then punching deep into his entire mouth. Louis gripped the chair even tighter yet, the muscles in his arms bulging.

Then, as quickly as it began, it ended.

The dentist regained his straight posture and set the needle aside. "There now, Mr. Baker. That wasn't so bad, now was it?"

Instead of vocalizing his response, Louis simply shook his head back and forth in a "no" gesture.

"Glad to hear it," the dentist said. Just then, Louis noticed that the other man was sweating even harder than before, and that the doctor's face seemed strained. It was as if he was anxious for some reason or another.

Louis thought, *if anyone should be anxious, it's me!*

But that thought did not make him feel any less strange.

The dentist subconsciously put a gloved hand to his forehead, wiping sweat away in the process.

Louis' eyes narrowed questioningly and he asked, "Are you all right?"

"Huh?" The dentist returned his thoughtful expression. "I'm fine. Why do you ask?"

"You just look a little…warm."

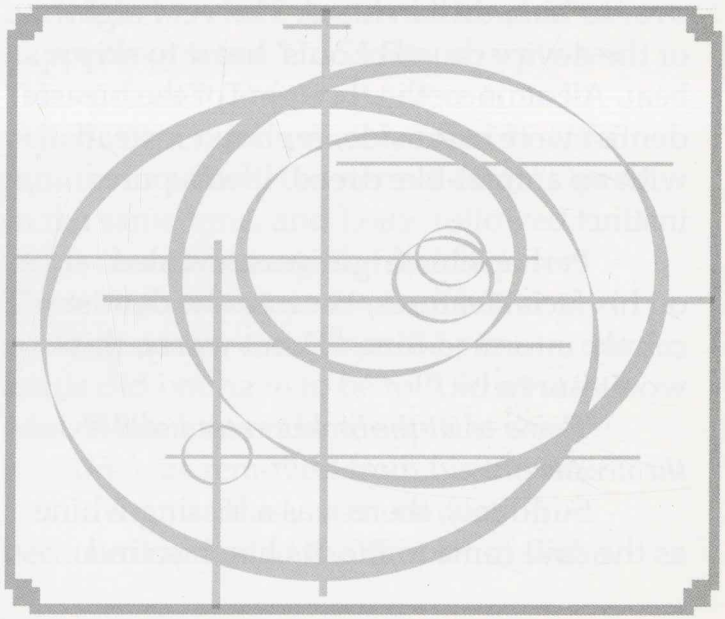
"No problem. Just a little stuffy in here, that's all." As if to stress this fact, the dentist grabbed the collar of his coat and fluttered it.

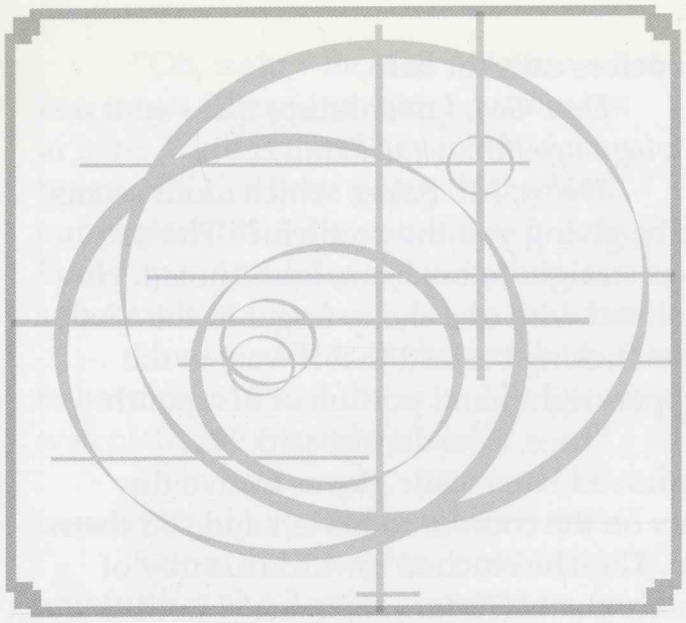
"Oh," Luis responded. He thought, *but it's chilly in here.*

Several moments of silence followed as the numbing agent took affect. Louis ran his eyes all over the room, still feeling nervous. For some reason, he did not want to meet eyes with the sweating dentist, though he was not sure why. He knew that the needle prick had been bad, but that the worst of all was still to come.

*The drilling, the awful, awful drilling.*

Finally, after a few awkward minutes, Louis' mouth was numb. As if he were a mind reader, the dentist asked, "How we doing on the numbness, Mr. Baker?"





As close as he was, Louis thought he could smell, ever so faintly, the smell of sweat. It was as the man had neglected using deodorant that morning.

*Wait, it's probably sixty-five degrees in this damn office. Why would he be sweating? Some disease, maybe?*

Louis was not sure.

The doctor pulled the mirror out of his mouth and leaned back, thankfully taking the stench of sweat away with him. He placed the small item onto the tray before focusing on Louis. "And you say it's been causing you pain?"

"Um, yeah," was Louis' weak reply. Then: "Don't you have that information in like a file or something?"

There was a brief flash in the Dentist's eyes, something that resembled a dark storm cloud. "Of course I have that information, Mr. Baker."

Then, without any further comment, Dr. Smiley returned his attention to the tray of (Torture Implements!) instruments.

*Then why in the hell did you ask?* Louis thought. He wanted to ask the question aloud, but didn't dare too.

After a few moments, the dentist rolled toward him once again, but this time held something much more threatening than a little mirror: It was a needle, one that was pointy and hungry looking.

A fine sheen of sweat was now pouring out of Louis, and he thought it would not be long before he started to stink as well.

"We're just gonna numb you a little," the dentist's ever-pleasant voice droned on a million miles away. "This won't hurt a bit."

Louis thought, *bullshit!* His hands gripped the arms of his chair so tightly that he did not feel the pain underneath his nails. All of his attention was focused towards the very tip of the needle, which would desecrate the privacy of his gums, sending sharp pain throughout his body even before it helped to numb it.

*Dear God, this is going to hurt so fucking bad!*

The dentist leaned in closer, needle poised. He said, "Now open up wide for me again, Mr. Baker." Louis's fingers gripped the chair's coating even tighter. His first thought was to flatly refuse Dr. Smiley's orders, but he

tried to relax a little.

The office was just like all dentists' office. There was a silver sink in one corner of the room, which reminded Louis of the same kind they had installed into airplanes. Above the sink was a row of cabinets which contained God knew what. There was a small wastebasket nearby. On the far side of the room was a window, though no blessed view was available on account of long, khaki colored curtains. Opposite the sink was a door which Louis supposed gave way to a closet. In the exact center of the small room was a recliner chair, and next to that was a tray with several different little instruments... some of which looked sharp.

Louis gulped down again and said, "It's been a while, you know. A while since I have been to see a dentist. To be perfectly honest with you, I'm not real fond of them. Uh...of going to see them I mean."

With a sympathetic eye, Dr. Smiley's sprouted a grin. "Not to worry, sir. It really isn't as bad as the worry people always put themselves through. I promise, I'm a professional. You have nothing to worry about." He gestured for Louis to sit in the chair. No, it was more like he *beckoned* for him to sit in the chair.

The dentist's words did not make him feel any better, not in the least bit. As if his body was made of wood, he slowly limbered over to the chair. As if recovering from a final denial, he accepted the reality of the fact and slid into the chair. As he adjusted himself into a comfortable position, his skin made squeaking noises against it. In his mind, the noises were like hopeless calls for help.

*Dear God, I can't believe that I'm having to go through with this...*

"Now, Mr. Baker, which tooth seems to be giving you the problem?" The man was straight to business, Louis noted. He pointed with one shaky finger to the tooth (the fucking bastard that it was) in the upper- right hand portion of his mouth.

"I see," the dentist said. He removed two elastic gloves from a tiny box on the counter to his left and slid them on. Then he reached towards his tray of instruments (*Torture implements!* Louis's mind screamed) and when his hand returned, it contained a mirror at the end of a long silvery pole. He pulled a rolling-chair away from the closet door and sat in it. "I'm going to have to have a look at it, Mr. Baker."

Dr. Smiley's voice was perfectly clam, though he seemed a little preoccupied.

*He's just tired, Louis. You would be too if you had to gaze down people's traps forty hours a week.*

But still, there seemed something suddenly puzzling about the dentist. Louis could not place his finger on it, nor did he have the time too as Dr. Smiley said, "Open up wide for me."

Louis did so. Dr. Smiley leaned in with his mirror, sticking the protrusion into his mouth. Louis' tongue flicked the invader, as if in protest, and he could feel how cold it really was.

*At least it isn't the drill...Good God, at least he hasn't whipped that out yet.*

The Dentist mumbled to himself, "mmhmm."

"Oh, right," he said, "I know what you mean. There aren't any customers in here. Truth is that I haven't had many today. No, I've been going through all our paperwork." He paused, as if sizing Louis up. "And I can tell you, there is a substantial amount of work to be done."

Louis nodded, slightly embarrassed to have reproached the man. His excuse was plausible enough, after all.

Then he thought, *customers?* Had the man referred to patients as...*customers?*

Before his thoughts could carry on any further, the dentist gestured towards the back of the office. "Why don't you come on back and we'll get down to business."

Louis started to move forward, ready to do just that, but then remembered something. "Hey," he said, almost whispering, "where is everybody else?"

Having turned to head to the back, the dentist gazed over his shoulder. "Everybody else?" he asked.

"Well, yeah, the receptionists."

"Oh!" The dentist turned and slapped one knee, a bright smile forming on his lips as if to say, *how silly of me.* "Who else could you have been talking about? Well, I'm sorry to say, but they're all sick. You know that flu that's been going around?"

Louis nodded again. Many of his co-workers had been sick lately too, including his own sister. Among other recent tribulations in his life, Louis counted himself lucky for having avoided the sickness thus far.

"Well, wouldn't you believe that, of all four of the ladies that work for me, all of them caught it?"

"It must be a coincidence," Louis responded.

"True," said the dentist. "But you know, as long as I'm healthy, I'm working. I've had to go through all that darn paperwork when it's really their job." With that, the dentist turned and started walking to the back of the office. Louis nodded again for the hundredth time and followed through the doorway.

Because of the strangeness that the office and the lack of personnel exuded, Louis' fear had been temporarily forgotten. Yet with each step he took down the short hallway filled with oil paintings, the heavier his feet became. The closer he got to a door near the to the end of the hall, the more the hair on his neck stood up and the faster his heart began to beat. As they advanced, the fear and nervousness returned in a huge tidal wave. As they stepped into the back office, one image gloomed largely in his mind's eye: Dr. Rowley holding his sharp instrument, ready to plunge it all the way down his throat.

He gulped just as the dentist turned towards him, looking as plastically cheerful as ever. "I must have forgotten my manners, Mr. Baker, but I didn't introduce myself properly. I'm Dr. Smiley."

Louis croaked out a response: "Nice to meet you."

"Knife to meet you, too," was the dentist's response.

Louis nodded, but then confusion entered his mind as he wondered, *did he just say...?* No, he inwardly nodded. His nerves were making him hear things. He

*Strange,* he mused.

Louis walked over to the receptionist's counter, his feet feeling like led as he did so. Though the lack of presence behind the counter was odd, there was nothing as of yet wrong. He felt sweat on the back of his neck nonetheless.

He placed both elbows onto the counter and leaned forward, running his eyes throughout the office but seeing noting of importance.

Not wanting to break the awful silence for fear of what would come next, he weakly muttered, "Hello?"

For a few moments, there was nothing.

The silence stretched on until Louis was sure that he was alone in the office.

Just as he leaned off the counter, and much to his relief, a man dressed in a white coat appeared from around a corner near the back of the office. The man was tall and thin, with average features. He was balding at the top, and what little hair was left was nearly the same dark shade as his own.

"Hi there!" the dentist called enthusiastically. His expression was somewhat friendly, like an amusement park attraction.

"Hi there," Louis returned the salutations, though with a bit less sureness.

The dentist briskly made his way around a heavy desk and through a doorway. He disappeared momentarily until he appeared from behind yet another corner. He stopped a few feet short of Louis with his hand outstretched.

"You must be…Mr. Baker, right?"

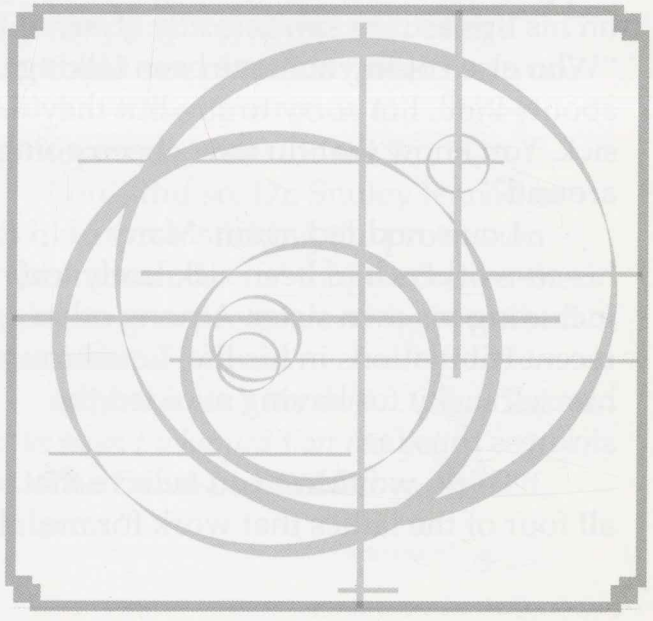
"Yes sir," Louis replied, taking the hand in his own. It was cold and waxy in his grip, as if he were shaking with a life-sized doll.

The dentist released his grip and went on: "Sorry to have kept you waiting so long, it's been a pretty busy day and all…"

"I understand, it's no prob," Louis replied, his eyes moving from side to side. It did not look as if things were busy, not at all.

"It doesn't look that busy," Louis said.

At first, the dentist seemed shocked by those words, but then he quickly regained his former confidence and let loose a small chuckle.

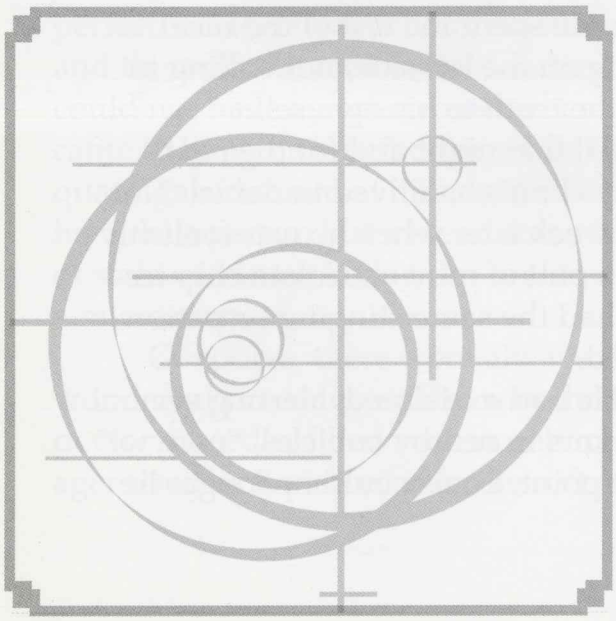


to himself: He had a cavity.

However, this did not mean he was willing to have someone go shoveling away at the tooth-wound, either. It had been a hot debate with his wife, who demanded outrigbht that he was being foolish by not dialing her regular dentist, a man named Andrew Dobbs.

As he sat in the cold and uncomfortable office of a dentist who was not named Andrew Dobbs, he could recall those fraught and almost plea-like words he had uttered to his wife: *I would rather just let it rot and fall out of my mouth then the let some asshole whacko in a white robe stick a needle into* my *head!*

In the end, she had won as she always did. The argument had petered out after a few days and had given Louis time enough to realize how foolish he was being.



As ordered from the General (his nickname for his wife) he ended up dialing those hateful numbers to doctor Dobbs, only to find out that he and his wife had been murdered by a burglar the very day before.

Louis could remember his amazement as the soft and solemn voice on the other end gave him some the bleak details. After hanging up, he had related the news to his wife, who called him a liar and demanded that he stop making excuses. He then assured he was not, and after the initial shock a new order was given from the General: Call a new dentist.

The only other dentist in town was a man named Richard Smalley, and a friendly (always friendly) female voice on the other end of the phone line had given him an appointment.

"And here I am…" Louis calmly whispered to himself, picking up where his thoughts had left off.

It suddenly occurred to him that he was alone. He stood up from his chair, his knees popping. He was of an average build, though was slightly overweight, and had short brown hair that sat atop a square-shaped face.

There was nobody behind the receptionist's counter. When Louis had entered the office minutes before, he had initially thought nothing of it. He checked his watch and was nearly shocked to see that nearly a quarter of an hour had gone by while his thoughts had kept him busy.

day, Louis flinched away from such thoughts. He was nervous as a tick, as his mother would say. He desperately felt the need for a cigarette, but had foolishly left his pack in his car.

*Besides,* he mused, *this is probably a smoke-prohibited zone anyway.*

Louis sighed, his craving not giving in at all.

When he thought about it, Louis supposed this fear (for which his wife endlessly ridiculed him) went back to his childhood-as did most fears.

At the innocent age of seven, his mother had taken him to their town's only dentist after he had not developed one or two, but *three* cavities. What was worse than his mother's oath that he would never again touch another soda until he learned how to take care of his teeth was that he had to miss his favorite television show, *Scooby Doo.* However, these worries were soon dwarfed because his dentist at the time, Franklin Rowley it had been, was nearly seventy years of age and was in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's disease, though nobody knew it yet.

*The old bastard shouldn't have still been working,* Louis thought, shaking his head back and forth.

Though cheerful and kind, the old dentist had been busily at work in his mouth with the small scraping device (Louis had no idea what it was called) when he had simply slipped. Louis, just a little boy, had jerked in response to the sudden, sharp pain, not tasting the blood until seconds afterward. His shrill screams sent bales of alarm through Dr. Rowley, whose apologetic gestures and words were completely lost to the young Louis.

Though he was just one short month short of retirement, Dr. Rowley had ripped a long zig-zagging line into his gums. It was the worst pain Louis had suffered, ever.

He grimaced, remembering the shock and the coppery taste of his own blood.

Since then, Louis had made it a mission to take only the best of care when it came to his mouth. His dental visits after that experience had been few and far in between. As he entered his adult years, he did so without ever having contracted another single cavity.

Then, a month before, Louis and his wife were eating at Taco Bell when he felt a deep and sharp pain as he bit into a hard-shell. At first, he had thought nothing of it and so shrugged it off. But another few bites and the pain had repeated itself in one of the teeth located in the upper right-hand portion of his mouth. He spent the rest of the meal chewing on the left side, not willing to admit the truth to his own self.

All that night and for the next few days Louis had lived in denial. Not until a week later when he was foolishly eating a pint of mint chocolate-chip ice cream had the same stinging sensation returned.

He had exclaimed, alerting several co-workers in nearby cubicles, "owww!" At that point, Louis could no longer lie

# The Dentist

Ben Stoddard

Louis Baker absolutely dreaded having to go see the dentist, any dentist ever.

In fact, his personal motto on the subject was as follows: *I'd rather ride a unicycle into the path of an on-coming train than to have some asshole in a white coat go digging into my mouth.*

His wife, who was in his own mind the queen of good hygiene, was not amused by such sentiments.

Either way, it did not matter to Louis.

He could not stand the idea of waiting in a chilly, bland office filled with outdated magazines that were filled with the most useless of information pertaining to the shenanigans of Hollywood stars, tips on creating the perfect dining-room set, or pictures of some ancient village he would never see. He could not warm to the idea of the impersonal receptionists, with their perfectly calculated, robotic movements and their plastic smiles and courtesy. He could not have an open mind when it came to lying on a stiff chair while some quack gazed down at him, and not as if he were a person but instead some type of stale specimen laying flat underneath a microscope.

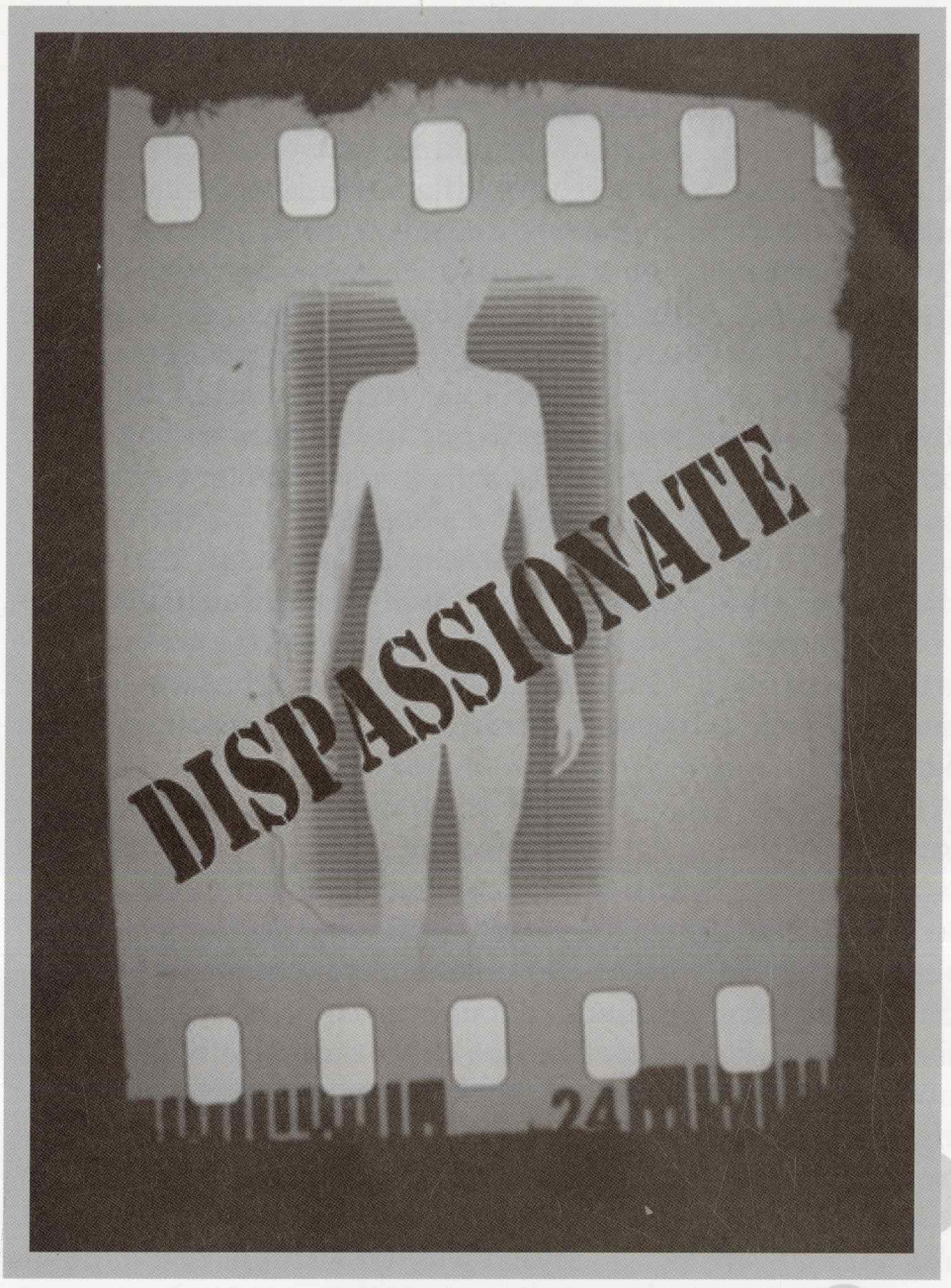
Of course, there were always the wonderful procedures. The way the doctor's needle, filled with numbing-agent, felt as it pierced into the soft tissue of one's gums, as if it were a railroad spike striking into soft earth. There was the high-pitched whine of the dentist's monstrous drill, slicing into the tooth with no mercy and ringing throughout the skull and into the ears as if it were a lumberjack's chainsaw. Or even the little instrument the man in the white coat (which was always reminiscent of the same coats they wore in loony bins) used to scrape off those stubborn little bits of steak from out of the cracks of his teeth, the same little device that acted in much the same way a piece of chalk would when torn across the surface of a board.

And always before such procedures, as if in denial, the dentist would say, *you're going to feel a little discomfort,* when they really meant, *this is going to hurt like some supreme unholy bitch of a bastard, so just get use to it.*

Then there was the waiting, the cold, hard waiting. Perhaps the worst part of the entire miserable experience was the series of events that led up to it. At that point, the patient who was unlucky enough to require the medical expertise of a dentist was left to rot with the same boring, ancient magazines, helpless to block out the little bird-like responses from the aides who worked the phones.

Yes, it was the waiting itself that was worst of all. Just to sit there, anxiously ticking off the fears as to what was to come as if he was nothing more than a convict waiting to be executed.

Sitting, lonely, in the office that




Dispassionate
Lee Beaver

# Popcorn

Stephanie Munkachy

I saw a piece of popcorn on the floor in an adjacent stall in a Carmike Cinema 12's bathroom. The first thing that popped into my head was, what kind of jackass brings their popcorn into the bathroom? And into the stall, even? Don't they know that there's fecal matter on everything in there? You can't help it—you have to touch the door to get to the sink. And the toilet seat doesn't even have a lid. Can you imagine the amount of dysentery-infected microscopic poop droplets that land on every kernel every second you're in there? I can't. And the warm nutrient-rich butter is probably the perfect breeding ground for any number of potentially life-threatening organisms. Even if you try to shield the bag with you body after you flush, it takes a while to unlock the door. Were they eating the popcorn on the pot? That's even worse. You shouldn't confuse your digestive system like that, making it digest at the same time it's trying to get rid of things.

I picture a snotty, care-free teenage girl with too much makeup on eating fistfuls of popcorn while taking a pee and text-messaging her friend about the progress of the latest blood-bath that passes for a horror flick getting sick from E. coli and dying not three minutes after leaving the bathroom. Thinking about this makes me feel a lot older than I am.

Oh, I think. It was probably just tucked into the folds of her shirt, or her jacket pocket. It's hard to hit your mouth every time in a dark theater, even when you move slowly with small quantities. And popcorn can get into any little crevice. It probably just fell out of her jeans as she was sitting down and she didn't even notice.

I picture a more reasonable and adult-ish person, more like myself. Round-faced and dark haired, comfortable shoes. She had to rush out of one of those more up-beat sappy-type movies because she drank too much water or diet soda, and was trying not to miss anything important. This makes me feel better. Safer.

I think, it's really strange how I formed so strong a feeling and passed so decisive a judgment in so short a time based on so little. Who do I think I am? Do people see me, or my shitty car, or the pumpkin I left on the front stoop of my apartment building just a few weeks too long and think, man, what an asshole? Does anyone look at the jellybean on the classroom floor that I dropped but neglected to pick up the hour before (not out of forgetfulness, but just because I didn't feel like it) and think, who eats jellybeans in class? It's not even a real food item. This person wasn't eating for necessity because they were hungry and had to skip lunch for class, but just because they wanted something else to do. That's just disrespectful. And what kind of douchebag drops a piece of candy and doesn't pick it up and throw it away? Do they want ants in here, or worse yet roaches? They don't sweep these rooms. How would they like it if a roach crawled up their pant leg in the middle of class? Because if that happened to me, and it was because of that damn jellybean, I would find whoever it is that left it sitting there to attract all manner of invasive arthropods, and I would personally make them wish jellybeans had never been invented. I wonder what flavor it is, anyway.

I didn't pick up that rogue jellybean. Because there's something delightfully, guiltily pleasurable about anonymously doing something slightly bad or wrong or irresponsible and just leaving it, for the next person to find. Maybe they'll clean up your mess, or maybe your legacy will live on as a message to everyone, that you existed, that you felt like you didn't quite belong in this environment, and that maybe you were a little too good for it.

I guess that's the root cause of humanity's propensity for destruction. It's not a desire to see things crumble, really, it just so happens that demolition is easier than construction. It's a feeling of indifference coupled with a desire for immortality. Because if you screw up everything you touch, those that follow you to fix it will always remember you, even if they're cursing your name. I guess that's why we can never live in harmony with anything—not each other, not other animals, not even the world on which we live. We're doomed to casually drop the popcorn, pretend we didn't notice, and leave it for someone else to sweep up or tread into the carpet.

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# Letter from the Editor

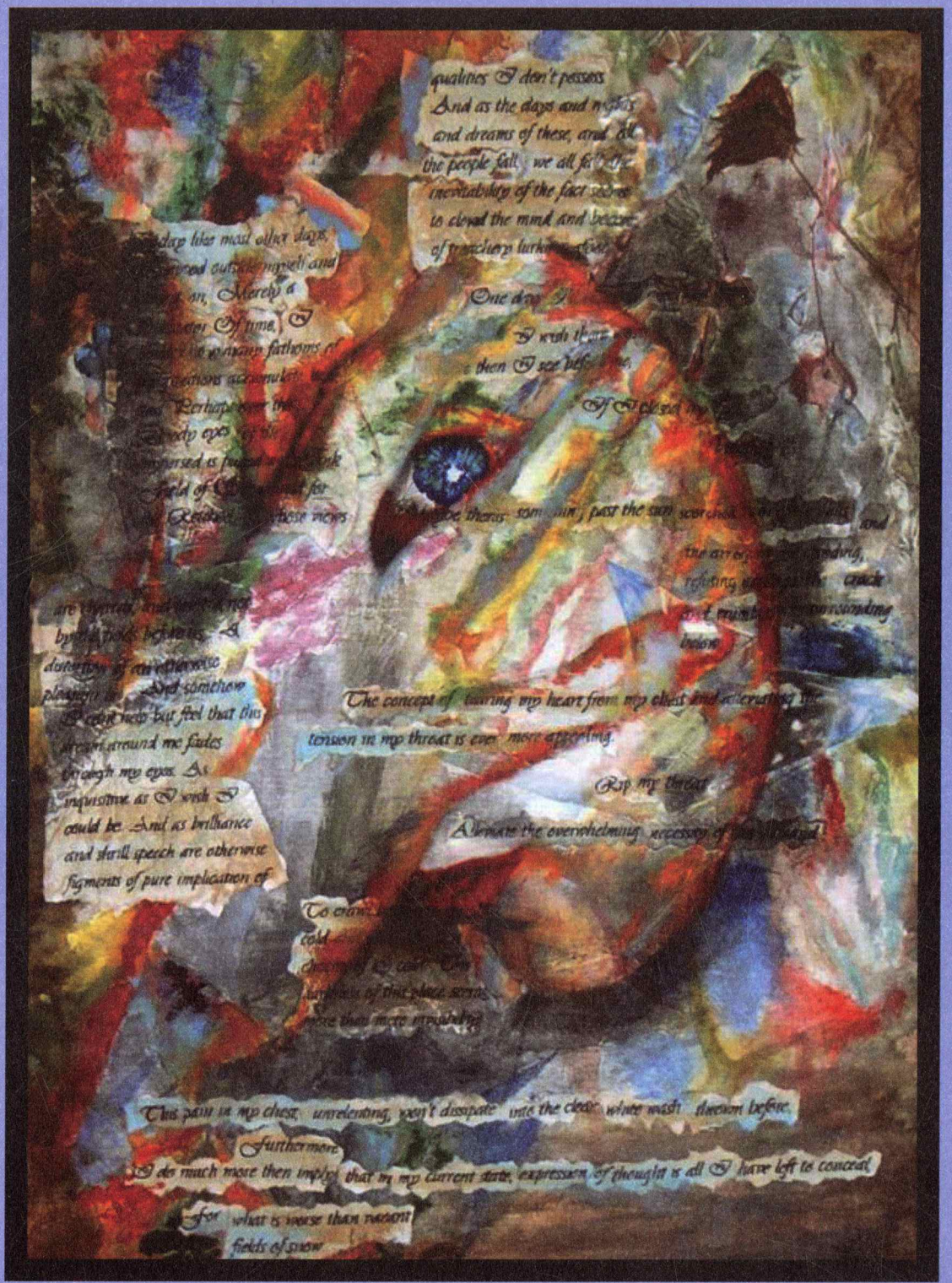
The editor of the 2008 *Tower* was Jessica Moseley, who despite having done all of the work to prepare for publication and despite all best efforts, found it impossible to publish. In an effort to further my quest to pull the *Tower* out of obscurity and to honor all those people who were supposed to have been published in 2008, I chose to incorporate the work Jessica compiled (including acknowledgement of her editor's choice works) into my own *Tower*. I thank Jessica for her help and for giving me access to the 2008 works. Thus, I present the *Tower Double Issue*!

Amanda Hosey,
*Tower* editor, 2009

# the TOWER 2008

# The Tower

The Double Issue

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